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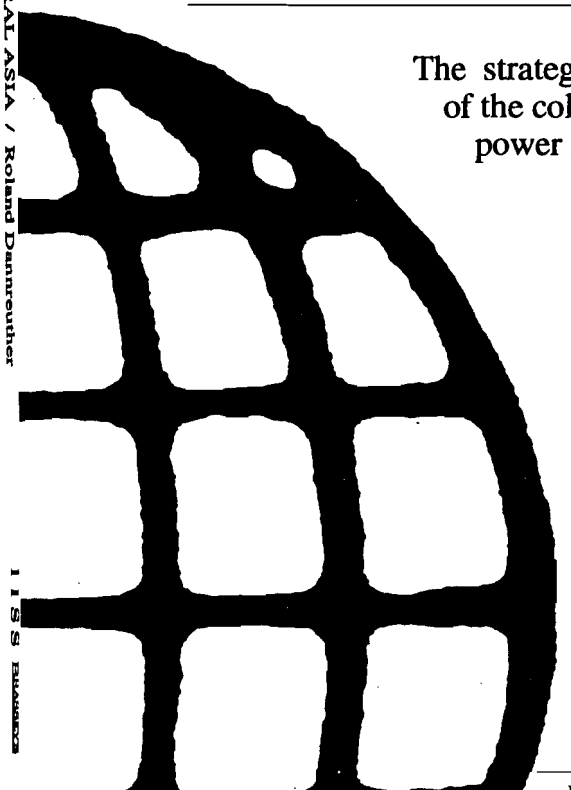
Creating New States in Central Asia

ROLAND DANNREUTHER

The strategic implications of the collapse of Soviet power in Central Asia



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Roland Dannreuther is a Research Associate at the IISS, and the author of Adelphi Paper 264, *The Gulf Conflict: A Political and Strategic Analysis*.

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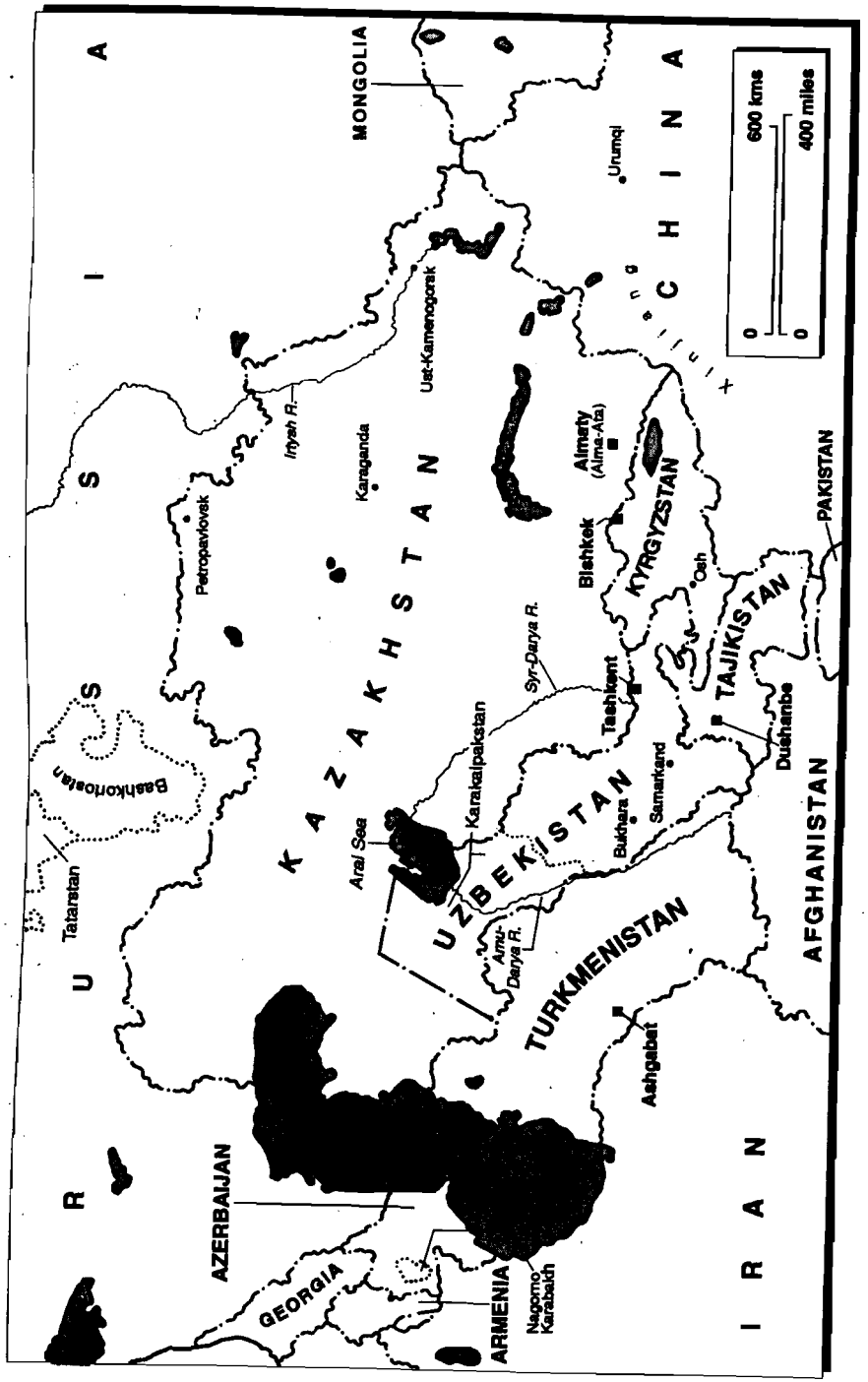

Creating New States in Central Asia

INTRODUCTION

The most resonant image of the collapse of the Soviet empire was the demolition of the Berlin wall. More than any other event, this came to symbolise the ending of the Cold War and the liberation of Eastern Europe from Soviet occupation. Its emotional potency also highlighted the predominantly Eurocentric focus of most of the West's interest in the removal of the Iron Curtain and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The potential reunification of Europe was viewed as the defining consequence of the retreat of Soviet power. The fact that an enormous territory in Central Asia, twice the size of Western Europe, had also been liberated from Soviet rule remained relatively unnoticed. The emergence of five new states in this vast territory – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – did little to clarify the strategic implications of this new geo-political reality.[1] Where there was an external response, it was cautious, even alarmist, and shared none of the euphoria associated with the events in Europe.

One reason for this unenthusiastic response was the precedent set by the Caucasus and Yugoslavia. In both these cases, the weakening of imperial controls had unleashed ethnic and national tensions resulting in violence and civil war. Hopes for a smooth transition towards stable and democratic government had subsequently been undermined by the increasingly violent and uncompromising confrontations over disputed territories such as Nagorno-Karabakh or Bosnia-Herzegovina. Given the many outward similarities between Central Asia and the Caucasus or Yugoslavia, external observers and policy-makers justifiably feared that the new countries of Central Asia would be similarly unable to consolidate their national identity and engage in the necessary post-Soviet political and economic reforms. Ethnic, nationalist and religious divisions were expected to undermine any sustainable process towards political and economic stability. The emergence of a brutal and bloody civil war in Tajikistan in the winter of 1992–3 appeared only to confirm such fears.

The geographical closeness of Iran and its brand of radical Islam was another factor in the cautious reception of the new Central Asian states. It was feared that the strategic vacuum created by the Soviet withdrawal would leave Central Asia vulnerable to the expansion of

Iranian-inspired Islamic fundamentalism. To counter this perceived threat, Russia, Western and Arab countries joined together to support Turkey's attempts to influence the political direction of the Central Asian states through its promotion of a common Turkic destiny. For the outside world, Central Asia appeared to be the battleground of a new 'Great Game', pitting Turkey against Iran and the opposing ideologies of Kemalist secularism and Islamic fundamentalism. The growing prominence of Islamist groups in the Tajik civil war again seemed to confirm that this imported ideological confrontation was the principal challenge facing post-Soviet Central Asia.

This paper argues that these gloomy prognoses for the future of Central Asia have proved to be substantially flawed in the two years since the disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991–93). In contrast to the Caucasian or Yugoslav situation, Central Asia has a relatively stable regional order. The term 'relatively' should be stressed: there exist powerful ethnic, nationalist and religious tensions in the region which can potentially ignite into violent confrontation and even lead to civil war, as in Tajikistan. However, the Central Asian states, with the partial exception of Tajikistan, have succeeded in consolidating their powers of coercion and have shown themselves capable of overcoming internal and external threats to their integrity. Even in Tajikistan, the success of the *ancien régime* in regaining power with the help of Russia and other Central Asian countries has ultimately revealed the strength rather than the weakness of the existing conservative state order. This enforced stability is not, however, without its costs. Democracy has made little impression on most of the states in Central Asia. Both the ruling elite and its subjects have generally viewed autocratic rule as the most effective guarantor of stability and economic prosperity.

The 'Great Game' between Iran and Turkey has also proved to be something of a damp squib. Iran has acted with an unusual degree of pragmatism. Foregoing its revolutionary rhetoric, it has quietly promoted economic and cultural links and has avoided any overt propagation of its Islamic ideology. As the regimes in the Central Asian states have remained adamantly secular and nationalist, Iran has been gradually accepted as more of a valuable economic partner than a direct ideological threat. If Iranian diplomacy has been quietly successful, Turkey's efforts have been more ambitious and, as a result, more disappointing. Whilst its promotion of the common Turkic origins linking Turkey with the Central Asian states did strike an emotional cord, emotional sympathy could not compensate for the limited political and economic support that Turkey could realistically offer the

Central Asian states. These new, impoverished states were not willing to forego other potential sources of external support for the dubious privilege of being members of some pan-Turkic commonwealth.

For all its romantic allure, the 'Great Game' analogy failed to provide a satisfactory analytical framework for two main reasons. First, it did not take sufficient account of the strength of Russia's resolve to remain the dominant external power in Central Asia. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, many commentators had implicitly assumed that Russia would swiftly withdraw from the region. But this ignored the many economic, political and military links which could not simply be severed and which served the mutual interests of Russia and the Central Asian states. Russia's continuing strategic concern was to ensure that the region remained stable and that no external powers, such as Turkey or Iran, would be able to supplant Moscow's preferential status. For the new Central Asian governments, Russia's continued engagement was viewed as an essential insurance policy against instability and the complete economic collapse of the region.

Second, the 'Great Game' did not take seriously the independent identity and power of the Central Asian states. It was implicitly assumed that these states could only be passive recipients of the diplomatic intrigues of external powers. In fact, they have proved to be adept at international diplomacy, balancing alliances and foreign relations in a carefully calibrated exercise to bolster their economic and political independence. Even the relationship with Russia has to be seen in this light. The post-Soviet Russian presence cannot be viewed as just a new neo-imperialist disposition in Central Asia. Its presence is also pragmatically sanctioned by the Central Asian states as a necessary but temporary measure during the transition from Soviet dependency to independent existence. As these states consolidate their national independence, Russia will be expected to continue its process of withdrawal.

The arguments that the Central Asian region is relatively stable and that its states are already developing their own regional and international identity form the corner-stone of this paper. The resulting conclusion is that policy-makers – whether in the West, Russia or the Middle East – should begin to rethink their conceptual understanding of Central Asia with this in mind. The states of the region, especially Uzbekistan, should not be seen as quasi-Soviet adjuncts: they are new independent entities with their own agendas and ambitions and they will increasingly seek a role in the affairs of Central Asia and the Middle East. Uzbekistan already exerts an important external influ-

ence on the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Uzbekistan and the other Central Asian states will become ever-more significant elements in the balance of power at the centre of the Eurasian landmass, affecting the direct interests of Russia, China, Iran, Afghanistan and impinging on the security interests of countries much further afield. For this reason these new countries of Central Asia should be taken seriously.

This paper provides an introduction to the most salient features of Central Asia and its geo-strategic significance. Chapter I addresses the historical legacy of the pre-Russian period and the period of Russian and Soviet imperial rule. The fundamental ethnic, national, political, religious and economic structures of the Central Asian societies are identified together with their contribution to the stability of the region. Chapter II looks in detail at the period of independence from 1991–93 and provides an analysis of the internal features of the five Central Asian states. The aim of this chapter is to show what makes these states tick – to identify the major internal regional, ethnic and nationalist divisions and cleavages and their implications for domestic and regional stability. The extent of regional cooperation is also addressed. Chapter III widens the focus to the broader regional and international context and looks at the strategic concerns and involvement of Russia and other regional neighbours. The final chapter provides some conclusions, suggesting that Uzbekistan is a country to watch and that the West has a unique opportunity to fashion a non-confrontational relationship with an important Muslim region if it decides to adopt a more energetic and decisive approach.

I. THE HISTORICAL LEGACY

The most common historical perception of Central Asia is of backwardness and barbarism. The destructive terror of the campaigns of Genghiz Khan and Tamerlane has been etched on the collective consciousness of the neighbouring sedentary civilisations. Historians, dramatists and poets from the Middle East, China and Europe have all presented these Central Asian nomadic explosions as the ultimate exercise in barbaric nihilism, destroying without trace centuries of civilisation. The image of a primitive and barbarous region was subsequently used by the apologists of Tsarist imperialism to justify Russian colonial expansion into Central Asia as a *mission civilisatrice*, analogous to British and French advances into Africa.[1]

The actual history of Central Asia is far removed from this popular image. The indigenous peoples are in reality heirs to a culture of great richness and sophistication. With the Arabs, they participated in the cultural flowering which was the dynamic outcome of the expansion of Islam. Central Asia, or more accurately the provinces of Transoxiana (between the rivers of the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya) and Khurasan (northern Iran), was the centre of an extraordinary Persian–Islamic renaissance from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries. With the riches gained through vigorous trade along the East–West silk road, a succession of rulers patronised the arts in literature, painting and architecture. The Bukharan-based Samanid dynasty of the tenth century initiated the great period of Persian epic poetry which was to find its most consummate voice in the Shah-nama of Firdausi. The contemporaneous scientific and philosophical creativeness of al-Furabi and ibn Sina (Avicenna) considerably advanced medieval learning and their works were to be critical in the rediscovery of classical learning during the European Renaissance. In the field of architecture, the fourteenth-century Timurid dynasty provided the most visually dramatic examples. The Registan Square in Samarkand, which was to influence the architectural traditions of the Mogul and Ottoman dynasties, is a fitting testament to the cultural ambitions of the Timurids, and in particular of Tamerlane's successor, Ulugh Beg.[2]

Even though Central Asia suffered a political and economic decline after the seventeenth century as a result of decreasing trade along the silk route, this decline has often been exaggerated. The Soviet orthodoxy that Central Asia was caught in a non-progressive feudal time-warp until rescued by Tsarist and Soviet assistance ignored the continuing vitality of trading links and the evidence of a modest economic

renaissance in the nineteenth century.[3] In terms of relative wealth, at the beginning of the twentieth century Central Asia was not much poorer than Russia; statistics from the 1920s indicate that per capita incomes were almost four-fifths those in Russia.[4] In fact, the relative poverty of Central Asia increased during the Soviet period; in the 1960s Central Asian incomes were only between a half and three-fifths those in Russia.[5]

There is, therefore, no particular reason why the peoples of Central Asia need feel especially indebted to Russian and Soviet imperial rule. The brutality of the Soviet annexation of Central Asia and the social, political and economic engineering of the Stalinist period left a bitter legacy.[6] In the post-Soviet period of Central Asian independence historians have naturally sought to define a more authentic and nationalist historical record drawing on the richness of pre-Russian Central Asian history and culture. The fruits of this historical revisionism can be seen in the metamorphosis of the region's national icons and figureheads. In Uzbekistan, the figures of Tamerlane and the Ferghana-born founder of the Mogul dynasty, Babur, have replaced the previously ubiquitous Lenin. The Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Turkmen have similarly resurrected their Turkic nomadic warrior-heroes to act as the cultural guardians of the rebirth of their states.

The reappropriation of an indigenous Central Asian history is a natural post-colonial exercise, helping to forge the historical myths which act as the foundations of new nation-states. But it is not without its potential dangers. The history of the region is also plagued by divisions, ancient enmities and political disunity, of which the most explosive and fundamental are the competing claims of the sedentary and the nomadic populations. These divisions are rooted in the specific ecology of Central Asia, where nomadic pastoralism adapted to the arid steppelands and sedentary intensive agriculture was developed in the water-rich oases of the valleys.[7] From the sixth century onwards, this ecological separation assumed an ethnic dimension as Central Asia became the object of a succession of Turko-nomadic invasions and mass migrations. The indigenous sedentary Persian population became the principal victim of these nomadic invasions, with the region as a whole assuming a predominantly Turkic identity.[8]

The danger of any post-colonial reinterpretation of the past is that, if it fails to be strictly impartial, it can harm relations between different ethnic, social or religious groups, such as between Persian and Turk. In other areas as well, the past history of Central Asia has to be carefully evaluated for its relevance to the future. The reclamation of the region's Islamic religious inheritance is vital for consolidating a more

authentic cultural and religious identity, but the reintroduction of some of the less liberal Islamic practices prevalent prior to the Russian conquest would be socially damaging. For instance, the political traditions of Central Asian history are not noticeably democratic and, although there is no reason why they should be jettisoned for Western political implants, too faithful a replication of these traditions would be politically retrogressive.

The pre-Russian Central Asian past is not, therefore, a simple panacea for the future of the region. Likewise, the legacy of Russian and Soviet rule cannot be simply discarded, since many aspects of that legacy have become embedded in the basic structures of Central Asian society. Many of the reforms and changes implemented by the Russian and Soviet authorities were necessary and progressive, if often brutally enforced. Russian and Soviet rule, for all its faults, did introduce modernity, industrialisation and rapid social change to Central Asia and there is no practical prospect of a return to a pristine pre-Russian past.

Even at the most basic level of Central Asian identity, the period of Russian and Soviet imperial rule has left an indelible impression. Some of this is attributable to the, at least partial, success of Russian and Soviet attempts to assimilate the subject peoples of the empire, including those of Central Asia. The Tsarist military historian, Mikhail Venyukov, emphasised this distinctive aspect of Russian imperial policy by comparing Russians to 'Englishmen in India who do their utmost to avoid mingling with the natives . . . Our strength lies in the fact that . . . we have assimilated subject races, mingling affably with them'.[9] The Bolshevik revolutionaries, for all their outward support for the self-determination of the indigenous nations of the former Russian empire, had essentially the same ambition of cultural and political assimilation. Their ideal was to forge a common Soviet identity which would affirm its loyalty to revolutionary internationalism rather than local nationalism. Although the republics of the Soviet Union were given a formal autonomous status, they were warned to be 'socialist in content' and only 'nationalist in form'.

Although this Tsarist and Soviet ambition of forging a supranational imperial identity was rejected when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, it left its mark on the development of Central Asia's identity. The post-Soviet Central Asian leaders have been remarkably frank about their countries' past debt and continuing dependence on Russia. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has noted that his country 'is tied to Russia not even by thousands, but by millions of threads and millions of human destinies'.[10] The belief of President

Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan that 'we need Russia like the air, like water . . . No less important is our spiritual kinship' reflects a common view amongst the Central Asian ruling elite.[11] These statements are in striking contrast to the deliberate rejection of such close Russian links by the Baltic, Ukrainian or Caucasian post-Soviet nationalist leaderships.

Another factor which sheds light on the unusually benign attitude towards Russia's historical role in Central Asia is the basic political configuration of the region. The borders of the present states of Central Asia have no pre-Russian heritage. It was Russian and Soviet administrators who demarcated them and then set about building nations to fit the states. The Russian and Soviet involvement in nation-building was especially strong amongst the nomadic groups, particularly the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, who, isolated from the modern world, had had only an oral, if lively, cultural tradition. With Russian help, written Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages were created, historical sagas were transformed into national myths and territory was designated as their rightful property. In the nineteenth century, Kazakh nobles such as Chokan Velikhanov were educated in St Petersburg and became influential advocates of cooperation with Russia to overcome Kazakh backwardness. In the Soviet period, the Kyrgyz novelist Chingiz Aitmatov and the Kazakh writer Olzhas Suleimenov continued the fusion of Russian and Kazakh–Kyrgyz culture. Strange as it may seem to Western Europeans, many Kazakhs and Kyrgyz continue to see themselves as much European as Asian.

The other ethnic groups, nations and territories of Central Asia were similarly promoted within the framework developed by the Russian and Soviet imperial system. Whatever attempts are made to create a pre-Russian national mythology, the Tajik, Uzbek and other Central Asian nations and states are unmistakably partly Russian and Soviet creations. The Russian and Soviet legacy resides not just in areas of economics or education, which can be overcome in time, but also in the very identities of the region's peoples.

This nation- and state-building experience under Russian and Soviet rule has left the Central Asian peoples less implacably hostile to the period of imperial subjection than most other nations of the Soviet Union. In contrast to Ukraine or Georgia, the Russian and Soviet occupations are not perceived, at least to the same degree, to have destroyed a pre-existing independent national entity. In fact, the process of Uzbek, Kazakh, Tajik, Turkmen and Kyrgyz national development is popularly believed to have been advanced during the period of Russian imperial rule. It is symptomatic of this that subservient

Brezhnevite leaders, like Rashid Sharipov of Uzbekistan or Dinmukhammad Kunaev of Kazakhstan, have been officially honoured as national heroes by their post-independence successors.

For the post-Soviet Central Asian states, the acceptance of their Russian and Soviet past as a part of Central Asian history, and not purely as an alien intrusion, has ultimately provided a more stable framework for their transition to independence. Unlike in other parts of the former Soviet Union, the Central Asian elites have not been under intense popular pressure to destroy the structures inherited from Russian and Soviet imperial rule. They have been able to take a more gradualist path; seeking to reintroduce pre-Russian traditions, but without destroying the realities created through the period of Russian and Soviet rule. This pragmatic attitude can be seen in their approach to questions of ethnicity, statehood, nationalism and religion, which have all required a critical reassessment in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Ethnicity and statehood

Political unity has been a rare historical commodity in the history of Central Asia. The deeply entrenched divisions between sedentary and nomad and between Persian and Turk have traditionally prevented the formation of a clearly defined unified state. Only Tamerlane succeeded in welding together a unified Central Asian polity, but the short duration of his dynasty revealed the brittleness of this political construct. Prior to Russian annexation, Central Asian states did not attempt to forge a specific ethnic or nationalist identity and their borders were broadly determined by the contingent extension of imperial power.

Within these loose state formations, continually expanding and contracting depending on the military fortunes of the ruling elite of the time, the peoples of Central Asia were free to express a variety of overlapping identities. The most basic of these was related to place or lineage – to region and clan for the oasis dweller, and to tribe and tribal confederation for the inhabitants of the steppe. Another source of identity was cultural or ethnic, principally focused on association with the Turkic or Persian family of nations. The third and potentially most unifying source of identity was Islam, which by the late nineteenth century had penetrated the furthest reaches of Central Asia, incorporating, at least formally, the previously Shamanist Kyrgyz and Kazakh into the *Dar ul-Islam*. What did not emerge from these multiple and overlapping sources of identity was a clearly defined national consciousness on the European model of nation-state consolidation.

It was only in the Soviet period that a sustained attempt was made to forge distinct nation-state identities in Central Asia. Stalin sought to enforce these identities on the narrow basis of ethno-linguistic criteria. The present map of Central Asia reflects the outcome of that socio-political delimitation (*razmezhivaniye*), which lasted from 1924–36.[12] These new ethno-territorial divisions were necessarily messy and artificial creations. In a region where different ethnic groups had intermingled for centuries and where ethnic identity was only one of multiple sources of identity, there was no clean, clear-cut division to be made. The separation of Turk and Persian in the oases settlements was particularly problematic, as the newly formed Tajik and Uzbek nations were competitors for the same territory where hitherto they had lived together peacefully. Similarly, the Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Karakalpak, who could reasonably be said to come from the same basic ethnic stock, were separated into distinct republics, with the Karakalpak territory being arbitrarily subordinated to Uzbekistan. But the clearest example of the artificiality of the exercise was that the Ferghana Valley, geographically, historically and culturally unified, was divided between the three republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The destabilising potential of the Stalinist redrawing of the borders of Central Asia became apparent with the unravelling of the Soviet empire. From 1989 to 1990 there was a series of riots in Central Asia which had a clear ethnic, as well as social and economic, dimension. The bloodiest occurred in June 1990 and pitted Uzbek against Kyrgyz in the city of Osh in the Ferghana Valley, resulting in over 320 deaths.[13] There were numerous other territorial or ethnic disputes which were only barely repressed: Tajik claims to the towns of Samarkand and Bukhara; conflicting Kyrgyz–Tajik claims to the Isfaran region on their border; Russian claims on the northern oblasts of Kazakhstan; and demands by Gorno-Badakshan and Karakalpakstan for greater autonomy or even independence.[14]

Stalin's principal political objective in structuring a new ethnically based order was to prevent the diffusion of other potentially more powerful and integrative political identities. In the late nineteenth century, Central Asian intellectuals, loosely formed within the Jadidist (Renewal) movement led by the Tatar Ismail bey Gasprali (1851–1914), had been promoting the idea of a unified Turkestan with an Islamic identity, but with a modern, progressive political and social programme. The Bolshevik revolution had undermined the liberal democratic variant of this movement. However, the Jadidist spirit was inherited by some of the leading Central Asian bolsheviks, such as the Uzbek Fayzullah Khojaev and the Kazakh Ali Khan Bukeykhanov,

who tried to establish a Muslim national communism which would defend the unity of Central Asia and free it from imperial subordination to Moscow.[15] Stalin's political objective in giving Central Asia a divided ethnic identity was to destroy the pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic nationalist currents, championed by the Central Asian political elite. The liquidation of most of this elite in the purges of the 1930s marked the brutal climax of this ideological campaign.

Although Stalin succeeded in undermining the nationalist and Islamist challenges to Soviet rule, he failed to uproot all the political and social structures of Central Asian society. As the new ethno-nationalist categories had little meaning for the Central Asian peoples, they reverted to their more basic regional, clan and tribal identities. Since these identities were more deeply entrenched and less immediately visible, they remained effectively immune from the onslaught of Soviet social engineering. Over time, these social structures were incorporated into the Soviet administrative system. To assure effective control, Soviet officials deliberately selected certain regional, clan or tribal elite groups to implement Moscow's directives. The resulting compact, which was particularly entrenched during Brezhnev's era of 'cadre stability', came to be viewed as mutually beneficial. It secured the loyalty of Central Asia to Moscow and yet protected the structures of power and patronage of the traditional Central Asian elites.[16]

This regional, clan or tribal dimension is essential for understanding the political and economic history of the Central Asian republics during the Soviet period. For example, it was Sharaf Rashidov's clan from Samarkand which dominated Uzbekistan throughout the Brezhnev period. Similarly, the Leninabad clan effectively ruled neighbouring Tajikistan, and the Kazakh Greater Horde continued throughout the Soviet period to be the most politically powerful of the Kazakh tribal confederations in Alma-Ata. The Communist Party structure of power in the Soviet Union also aided this process of clan or tribal consolidation, since its centralised hierarchy encouraged the accumulation of power in the hands of a small ruling elite who were then free to promote their loyal kinsmen.

The subsequent history of corruption, tribalism and loss of indigenous traditions and identities has its roots in the original sin of the Stalinist politico-territorial demarcation. However, not all the Stalinist legacy to Central Asia can be considered unambiguously negative or damaging to the long-term interest of the region. In spite of Stalin's cynical use of ethnic criteria for the forcible repression of any opposition to his rule, the emphasis on ethnicity did capture one of the key ingredients of a cohesive modern nation-state. As has been graphically

confirmed in the break-up of Yugoslavia, the absence of a clear ethnic core for new states, combined with inter-ethnic disputes over the demarcation of rightful territory, is a recipe for instability and conflict. In Central Asia, thanks to the coercive policies of Stalin, the five states, with the possible exception of Kazakhstan, do have a core ethnic group with its own language and culture which is broadly accepted as the basis of the state's national identity.[17] Similarly, for all the seeming artificiality of these states' borders, they do represent a clear attempt to capture as much of an ethnic group in its eponymous state as is possible given the centuries of prior ethnic intermingling.

The result is that the new states of Central Asia are potentially more cohesive nations-in-formation than other post-colonial creations where less attention was given to ethnicity, such as in Iraq, Sudan or Zaire. Although the map of Central Asia is messy and there are many areas with territorial disputes, none of them have the same intensity as Nagorno-Karabakh or Bosnia-Herzegovina.[18] Most are relatively minor and do not awaken sufficient passion to lead to popular demands for major territorial revisions. The broad acceptance of the territorial and national status quo is a factor for stability in Central Asia, particularly when contrasted with the situation in the Caucasus or Yugoslavia.

The continuing vitality of regional, clan and tribal affiliations is also not as debilitating as might initially have been thought. Certainly, these social structures act as constraints against the formation of modern nation-states. They undermine the formation of national identities, perpetuating the social and political cleavages between regions and tribes. They are an obstacle to the promotion of a modern and technocratic elite, since nepotism and favouritism remain embedded in the system of patronage. It can also justly be argued that the need to satisfy the unelected representatives of regional and tribal interests undercuts any movement towards creating democratic accountability. Yet, in a period of rapid political and economic change, these clan or tribal structures provide an important framework for social cohesion and for the mediation of disputes, which helps to preserve social stability and prevent the disintegration of society into warring anarchic factions. In the transition towards forming independent national political units, they play a useful stabilising role.

The key challenge for the new Central Asian leaderships is to ensure that these sub-national structures are gradually reformed and incorporated into a more comprehensive and cohesive modern nationalist identity. Under the Marxist–Leninist straitjacket of the Soviet period, the leaders of Central Asia were constrained from using the nationalist and Muslim traditions of the region to overcome the allegiances of

family, region, clan or tribe. Now liberated from Soviet rule, these constraints no longer apply.

The nationalist and Islamic dimension

The initial development of a nationalist agenda in Central Asia came, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, from outside the Communist Party structure. Following the example of the Baltic states and the Caucasus, informal groups in Central Asia began to express dissent in the more liberal atmosphere of the late Gorbachev period from 1988–91. Their initial areas of concern were the ecological catastrophes which 70 years of socialist rule had inflicted on Central Asia. In Kazakhstan, a group called Nevada-Semipalatinsk, under the leadership of the writer Olzhas Suleimenov, publicised the ecological damage caused by the 500 nuclear tests on Kazakh territory and called for an end to all further testing. In Uzbekistan, a group called Birlik first emerged to protest against the drying up of the Aral Sea and the excessive development of cotton production. These groups were soon joined by a host of others, such as Rastokhez in Tajikistan, Ashar and Asaba in Kyrgyzstan and Agzybirlik in Turkmenistan. Their protests ranged from the promotion of national languages and culture to calls for greater autonomy from Moscow and the centre, although very few groups demanded all-out secession.[19]

The Central Asian republican leaders, with their orthodox communist background, naturally saw themselves as under threat from the growing popularity of the nationalist informal groups. With remarkable dexterity, however, they swiftly manipulated the new nationalist currents to their own political advantage. It was to their benefit that all, with the one exception of Saparmurad Niyazov of Turkmenistan, had become party bosses during 1989–91, when Gorbachev was reversing his earlier policy of centralising power away from the republics and clamping down on any nationalist or religious revival. Unlike their immediate predecessors, they were not tarred with the corruption, purges and violent inter-ethnic rioting which had been the direct consequence of Gorbachev's earlier policies. Gorbachev permitted his new appointees to institute more liberal social policies, to permit greater freedom of religious expression and to allow more open displays of nationalist self-expression. He only insisted that they remain loyal to the preservation of the Union.

With this new freedom, the Central Asian leaders quickly implemented many of the demands of the nationalist groups. During 1989–90, laws were passed to raise the languages of the titular nationalities to the status of state languages and to ensure their greater use in public

life. In the same period, declarations of sovereignty were announced and, following Gorbachev's example, the Central Asian party leaders transformed themselves into presidents. Although they remained loyal to the preservation of the Union, Karimov and Nazarbayev also went to great lengths to promote the interests of Central Asia and to show their constituencies that they were bargaining hard with the central authorities in Moscow.[20] By so doing, the Central Asian leaders successfully projected themselves as nationalist leaders, thereby undermining much of the popularity of the nationalist opposition.

The attainment of full independence at the end of 1991 further strengthened the nationalist credentials of the Central Asian leaders. The informal nationalist groupings had barely contemplated such unconditional independence. But once gained, the Central Asian leaders made sure that they received the lion share of the reflected glory. The introduction of the trappings of statehood – new flags, constitutions, the opening of diplomatic relations, introductions into international organisations like the United Nations (UN) – were perfect public-relations opportunities for cementing their national and international stature. With effective control of the media, and with their connections to the mass of the population through the structures of power inherited from the Communist Party apparatus, the presidents of Central Asia had an unassailable advantage over the nationalist groupings which were generally led by a city-based intelligentsia with only limited connection to, or support from, the countryside.

Whilst the nationalist mantle has been relatively easy for the ex-communist ruling elite to assume, the same cannot be said for Central Asia's Islamic inheritance. This is partly due to the fact that Islam is less forgiving of earlier apostasy and the Central Asian leaders have been less than convincing penitents. However many pilgrimages to Mecca they choose to undertake, they are always likely to be viewed as communists or, more charitably, as secular nationalists.

It is partially a reflection of this uneasy relationship with Islam that the Central Asian leaders have consistently drawn a line between Islam as a private religion and Islam as a political force. Whilst permitting its growth as a religion, encouraging the building of mosques and the establishment of religious schools and training colleges, they have resisted any manifestation of a political voice for Islam. Thus, in Uzbekistan, Karimov was willing to register political opposition groups like Birlik and Erk, but refused to countenance the registration of an Uzbek branch of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), which was established in Moscow as a Muslim democratic party.[21] In the other Central Asian states there has been a similar aversion to political

bodies assuming a strongly Islamic identity and the ex-communist ruling elite has generally committed itself to the separation of state and Islam.

The inherent difficulty of instituting a strict separation of state and religion is that conceptually it is contrary to Muslim tradition and historically it has little precedent in the pre-Russian history of Central Asia. This is particularly the case in the sedentary oases settlements of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where Islam was especially pervasive and deeply embedded. These tightly knit communities accorded considerable respect and power to the Muslim clerics and the *ulema*, who in turn defined the social, moral and political framework of their everyday existence. Bukhara's position as one of the leading religious centres of the Islamic world added to the fusion of spiritual and political power. The expansion of the Islamic sufic orders (*tariqat*), like the Naqshbandiyya, Kubrawiyya and Yasawiyya, which developed in the oasis towns of Central Asia, provided a universalist ideology which both cemented the political power of the sufic practitioners and increased popular devotion to Islam. In the nineteenth century, travellers to Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand vividly depicted the political and social power given to the *ulema* and dervish orders. At that time, the idea of a clear-cut division between state and religion was hardly comprehensible.

Amongst the nomadic inhabitants of the Central Asian steppelands, Islam had a different historical development and its political power was never as fully formed or deeply embedded. The mosque as a stationary object was an alien intrusion on a society perpetually on the move. The social structures of nomadic communities, which were generally freer and less restricted than their sedentary counterparts, did not provide the *ulema* with the same moral authority. Also, many of the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Turkmen remained committed to more naturalist religious expressions, such as the Shamanist devotions to the natural environment. The late arrival of Islam and its less intensive intrusion into nomadic society meant that it remained more in the private than the public domain. As a politically mobilising force, Islam was only used if it had some practical advantage. When there was a direct threat from a non-Muslim source, such as the mass Russian immigration into Kazakh–Kyrgyz lands during the late nineteenth century, the banner of Islam was unfurled to mobilise opposition. However, when the threat came from fellow Muslims, such as the Kokand khanate's intrusions into southern Kazakh lands, Islam played no role in the Kazakh defensive strategy.[22]

An understanding of the differences in the historical development of Islam amongst the sedentary and nomadic communities of Central Asia is essential for assessing the potential threat that Islamist political groups might present to the ex-communist leaders of the region. In the originally tribal communities of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, the idea of a separation of Islam from politics is not so alien to their historical experience. Even as Muslim observance grows from its present very low levels, it is unlikely to develop a widespread political form.[23] So long as the ruling elite is sufficiently sensitive, there should be little cause for concern. Gestures such as Niyazov's pilgrimage to Mecca and President Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan's confirmation of his oath of office on the Koran will probably continue to be sufficient.

In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the situation is very different. Years of Soviet-sponsored atheism have failed to lessen popular devotion to Islam or expunge the belief that Islam extends beyond private to public life. In Tajikistan, the consolidation of a radical Islamist opposition during the internal contest for power in 1992 revealed that the Islamist groups had superseded the nationalist political groupings in raw political power. In Uzbekistan, a similar process has taken place: the IRP has emerged as a greater threat to Karimov's power than the nationalist parties of Birlik and Erk.

The swift ascendance of political Islam in these two countries is not surprising, given its power for political mobilisation. For any potential opposition, an Islamic-centred political stance has the advantage of striking the ex-communist leaderships of Central Asia at their most sensitive point. These leaders know that demands for an Islamic state represent a call for their personal overthrow as well as that of their regime. As a political ideology, radical Islam also has the attraction of combining radical political objectives within an outwardly traditional framework. Intellectually, it has the attraction of being a simple set of doctrines, with a universalist, transnational appeal. For people used to the all-encompassing and intrusive ideology of Marxism–Leninism, it can be reassuring to find a more authentic replacement which provides a similarly comprehensive interpretation of the world with the backing of a global internationalist brotherhood. Just as committed nationalists have overnight become Islamists in Algeria or Egypt, so in Central Asia the transition from communist to Islamist is inherently no more difficult than the transition from communist to nationalist.

As a socio-political phenomenon, the emergence of political Islam in Central Asia cannot be understood separately from developments in other parts of the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East. This

undercuts the widespread contention that the Central Asian societies became so secularised during Soviet rule that they lost any strong Muslim identity. A recent case-study has shown that the Islamic resurgence in Tajikistan originated in the late 1970s and was mobilised by the Iranian revolution and the trans-national propaganda of political Islam, just like Islamist movements in other regions of the Muslim world.[24] Where there has been greater resistance to the Islamist message, as amongst the Kazakhs, Turkmen or Kyrgyz, this is more due to their historically weak Islamic identity than to the results of Soviet atheistic propaganda.

The range of options open to the Central Asian secular nationalist leaderships for dealing with the Islamist challenge similarly does not radically differ from that of their Middle Eastern counterparts. They can opt for repression as in Algeria or Egypt; they can seek to incorporate these Islamist groups in a democratic process as in Jordan or Yemen; or they can attempt to institute a conservative Islamic order as in Saudi Arabia. Repression is undoubtedly the preferred option at present, but the other options could become potentially attractive, at least in some of the states.

The legacy of dependence: economics and security

In Marxist terminology, phenomena such as identity, nationalism, religion or ideology are part of the superstructure of political reality, whilst economics is the essential underlying structure. This distinction is of some value for understanding the situation in Central Asia. In the areas which have been addressed so far, the Central Asian ruling elites have been able swiftly to project a new post-Soviet identity, even if it is essentially grafted onto many legacies of the imperial past. However, in other key areas, most importantly in the field of economic activity and in the provision of adequate defence and security arrangements, such an immediate and visible break from the Soviet inheritance cannot be sustained. In these two areas, the Soviet structures and institutions were so deeply embedded that they could not be thrown out if economic collapse and a dangerous security vacuum were to be avoided.

THE SOVIET ECONOMIC LEGACY

The Soviet economic system in Central Asia followed classic imperialist logic.[25] The Central Asian economy was an integrated part of the overall Soviet command system, primarily supplying raw materials for processing in the industrial centres of the European and western Siberian parts of the Soviet Union. A large proportion of Kazakhstan's

economy was devoted to the extraction of various ferrous and non-ferrous metals; much of the rest of the economy of Central Asia was dedicated to the supply of cotton fibre. In Uzbekistan, where over four million tonnes of cotton were produced annually, only 7% was actually processed within the republic and the rest was sent to European parts of the Soviet Union. Where there was a degree of industrialisation, such as in the northern regions of Kazakhstan or in the region around Tashkent, the technocratic personnel was predominantly European or Slav. The indigenous Kazakh or Uzbek populations preferred to remain in the countryside and were not attracted to the alien Slav industrial and urban environment.[26]

The degree of trade dependence of the Central Asian region can be seen in Table 1. The infrastructure of the region, whether in communication or energy links, reflected this high level of inter-republican trade dependence. Access to other potential markets, such as China or the Middle East, was practically non-existent owing to the lack of

Table 1: Trade in Central Asia

	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Turkmenistan	Tajikistan
Total trade as % of gross domestic product (1988)	34.2	39.7	42.2	42.2	46.7
% of which inter-republic trade (1991)	84.0	85.4	91.2	83.7	96.0

Source: Michael Kaser and Santosh Mehrotra, *The Central Asian Economies after Independence* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1992), p. 64.

roads, railways and pipelines. At the same time, the relatively poorer Central Asian economies were dependent on high levels of Union subsidies, as can be seen in Table 2. These statistics show that in 1991 Union subsidies represented around 20% of the gross domestic product of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The Soviet economic system was also notably inefficient and wasteful of resources. This was not just reflected in the poor quality of the goods produced and their uncompetitively high costs by world market standards, but tragically it was also seen in the ecological degradation of the former Soviet Union.[27] The most potent symbol of this in Central Asia has been the drying up of the Aral Sea, although there are numerous other examples. In the early 1960s, the Aral Sea was a living

Table 2: Union Subsidies in 1991

	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Turkmenistan	Tajikistan
Roubles (bn)	6	12	1.9	1.4	2.5
% of gross domestic product	7.4	19.5	12.5	17.6	23.3

Sources: World Bank, IMF, OECD, EBRD; supplied by the Economist Intelligence Unit.

and thriving economic resource, providing one of the most productive fishing and irrigated agricultural areas of the world. However, over the next 30 years the waters which had traditionally refreshed the Sea were diverted to irrigate the cotton crop, and by the 1990s the Sea had shrunk to half its earlier size with only a third of its volume. On the former sea bottom, salt deserts were created which killed off all the fisheries, devastated the local agriculture and severely affected the health of the 3.5 million people who had formerly depended on the Aral Sea for their livelihood. The tragic fate of these people makes this an ecological disaster of international proportions.[28]

All these accumulated trade dependencies, inefficiencies and ecological problems were inherited by the newly independent Central Asian states. They were confronted with a system which threatened to break apart without having an effective mechanism to replace it. The choices before the Central Asian leaders could only appear extremely stark. They were all realistic enough to realise that the Soviet economic dependencies could not be reversed overnight. To open up new markets they would need both to build a trading infrastructure with new countries and to produce goods which were competitive in the world market. Neither of these conditions was attainable in the short to medium term. In the intervening period, the preservation of the former inter-republican trading links and at least some of the former subsidies was essential if complete economic collapse was to be avoided. Yet, the political implications of this were also hard to stomach, since it seemed to consign the independence of the new Central Asian states to a shallow fiction with the underlying imperial economic dependence on Russia remaining unchanged.

The economic and political future would indeed look bleak if the Central Asian region did not possess one vital economic advantage – a rich natural resource base. Sizeable hydrocarbon deposits lie in a sedimentary trough that extends from the North Caucasus to the Tajik–

Afghan border. As can be seen in Table 3, the two main beneficiaries of this resource base are Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Through the nationalisation of its gas production, Turkmenistan's economic future is reasonably assured as it probably has a century of reserves as well as untapped oil. Similarly, Kazakhstan has an embarrassment of resource wealth, with large undeveloped oil reserves in the region around the Caspian Sea, sizeable gas reserves in the north of the country, and substantial coal and other metal and mineral deposits. Uzbekistan does not profit from the same degree of natural resources,

Table 3: Natural Resources and Cotton in 1992

	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Turkmenistan	Tajikistan
Oil (m tonnes)	25.8	3.2	0.1	5.2	0.1
Gas (bn m^3)	8.1	42.8	0.1	60.1	0.1
Coal (m tonnes)	127.0	4.7	2.2	–	0.2
Cotton (m tonnes)	0.24	4.12	0.05	1.28	0.42

Source: Supplied by the Economist Intelligence Unit.

but it has sufficient gas and oil reserves which, if developed, would make it energy-independent. The country also mines gold with an estimated output of 60 tonnes annually, about a third of the former USSR's total gold extraction. Only the two smaller countries of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan do not enjoy such resource benefits and will remain dependent on external sources for their energy supply.

The mere possession of these natural resources is not in itself sufficient to secure economic independence. External investment and capital has to be attracted to the region to develop these resources and to create the infrastructure required for supplying the world markets. At the same time, the economies of the region need to be reformed so that any income derived from the sale of these resources is not wasted in propping up inefficient industries or swollen bureaucracies. In a region where there is on average 2–3% annual population growth rate, economic growth needs to be dynamic to avoid the social tensions of large-scale underemployment. The failure of many resource-rich African and Middle Eastern oil-producing countries to rise to these challenges is a warning of the potential obstacles.

The economic challenges, therefore, that the Central Asian countries faced at the time of independence were threefold. First, they had to preserve inter-republican trading links as far as possible to lessen the decline in production and to overcome the necessarily difficult period of economic transition. Second, they had to reform their own economies to attract investment to develop their natural resources and secure a more productive agricultural and industrial base. Third, new markets needed to be opened up through the development of infrastructural links and the promotion of products which could be sold in the world markets. Only if these challenges were faced could the Soviet legacy of economic dependence be credibly weakened or overcome. However, in comparison with resource-starved Ukraine or the Baltic states, the Central Asian economies did at least have a potentially more advantageous starting-point.

THE SOVIET DEFENCE NETWORK

For the price of imperial subordination, the Soviet Union protected Central Asia from external threats and internal instability. Once it gained independence, that unconditional protection was no longer guaranteed. The Central Asian ruling elites had to confront a far more threatening environment. Externally, this included fears of Chinese imperial encroachments, the potential overspill of the anarchy raging in Afghanistan and the export of Islamic fundamentalism from Iran. Internally, it meant that the ex-communist apparatus, which had survived the transition to independence, could no longer rely on external intervention to protect them in any confrontation with other claimants to central power.

The immediate response of these elite groups to this more threatening strategic environment was to seek to preserve as much of the Soviet defence system as possible. The problem was that the Soviet armed forces had only marginal Central Asian participation and were effectively dominated by Russians and other European-Slavs. The officers and technical specialists in the Central Asian contingents of the Soviet Army reflected this Russian dominance. In Kazakhstan, only 3% of officers were of Kazakh nationality and similar percentages were the rule for all the other Central Asian nationalities.[29] Central Asian conscripts tended to work in construction groups and few joined active fighting units.

The collapse of the unified Soviet armed forces and the creation of the Russian Army in May 1992 only exacerbated the Central Asian states' sense of insecurity by forcing them to develop their own national armies. Although they inherited the units of the Soviet Army

which were located on their territory, these units were commanded by non-indigenous personnel whose allegiance to the new states was highly questionable. Russia also made clear that most of the strategic forces, most notably the nuclear weapons located in Kazakhstan, were not the national property of the state concerned. Finally, Russia stated that the Central Asian states would have to pay for the quasi-national armed forces on their territory, even if this was far beyond their economic means. Thus it became all too apparent to the Central Asian states that their security concerns could only be alleviated by forming a close strategic alliance with Russia.

The Central Asian leaders were aware of the probable strategic implications of any prospective break-up of the unified Soviet defence system. In the aftermath of independence, the need to limit the destabilising consequences of such a disintegration, without simply submitting to a new Russian imperial order, has been one of the thorniest issues facing the new Central Asian states. What transformed this question from a theoretical to a practical issue of the greatest urgency was the Tajik civil war.

II. THE CHALLENGES OF INDEPENDENCE

The Tajik civil war overshadowed the first two years of Central Asia's independence. The collapse of the Tajik state and the violence it brought in its wake highlighted the potential brittleness of the post-Soviet order in Central Asia. The factors which undermined Tajikistan were those structural weaknesses noted in the previous chapter – the strength of regional and ethnic divisions, the mobilising power of a political Islam, and the effects of the economic collapse and security vacuum after the Soviet imperial retreat. As a whole, the developments in Tajikistan present the most persuasive empirical evidence that Central Asia is potentially just as unstable a region as post-communist Yugoslavia or the Caucasus.

Yet an examination of developments in the other four countries of Central Asia and in Tajikistan suggests that its disintegration is more the exception than the rule for the region. Russia, acting formally within a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) collective security mechanism, has successfully enforced a cessation of hostilities in that country, which is likely to continue. The other four states of Central Asia have digested the lessons of the Tajik civil war and are unlikely to succumb to the same internal pressures. Any expectation that Central Asia might unify into a powerful integrated bloc, however, is unrealistic; mutual distrust between the different peoples and states of Central Asia remains all-pervasive. For the foreseeable future, the quest to consolidate an independent statehood will continue to be a far greater national priority than any ambition to forge a regional pan-Turkic or pan-Islamic union.

Tajikistan – descent into civil war

The root causes of Tajikistan's troubles can be traced, as much else in the region, to Stalin's exercise of ethno-territorial delimitation. Of all the republics created in Central Asia, Tajikistan was the most artificial and unsatisfactory. Historically, the Turkic-speaking Uzbeks and the Persian-speaking Tajiks had inhabited broadly the same territory and had inherited a common cultural and historical legacy. The 1924 delimitation assigned the greater part of this legacy to Uzbekistan. All the major historical urban centres, such as Khiva, Tashkent, Kokand, Samarkand and Bukhara, were designated as Uzbek territory. Uzbekistan also incorporated most of the population of the region, which in the 1989 census numbered 20m as against the 5m in Tajikistan. The Tajiks were left with the poorest and most mountain-

ous parts of the former Bukharan khanate. The loss of the Zerafshan Valley with Bukhara and Samarkand, popularly held to be historic Tajik cities, caused the greatest Tajik resentment. This sense of loss has only deepened the traditional hostility between the Tajiks and the Uzbeks, which draws on the rival Persian and Turkic claims to the land and culture of Central Asia.

Tajikistan's lack of a clear national centre, which Bukhara or Samarkand might have provided, was a major obstacle to the development of a cohesive Tajik national identity. Instead of a nationalist consolidation, discrete regional identities were strengthened and reinforced. The mountainous terrain of Tajikistan added to this process. At one extreme, the Leninabad (Khujand) oblast in the north, geographically part of the Ferghana Valley, is separated by a mountain range from the rest of the country, thus necessitating all the major communications links to pass through Uzbek territory. At the eastern extreme of the country, in the Gorno-Badakshan autonomous oblast, the sparsely populated territory includes a majority of Pamiris, who not only speak a different Eastern Persian dialect, but are also adherents of the Ismaili sect, viewed as heterodox by Sunni and Shi'a alike. Although Soviet ethnographers called these people 'Mountain Tajiks', some of the Pamiri intelligentsia see themselves as a separate and distinct ethnos.[1]

These distinct regional allegiances were incorporated into the Soviet structures of power. The Communist Party apparatus, the real Soviet locus of power, was dominated by a Leninabad clan. From the 1930 onwards, every First Secretary of Tajikistan not only came from Leninabad city, the capital of the Leninabad oblast, but also from the same street.[2] Leninabad's ally in the south of the country was the Kulyab oblast, whose delegates were given the greatest representation in the Supreme Soviet. The Kulyabis had the responsibility, which they had also held for the Bukharan khanate, of suppressing other southern claimants to power. This Leninabad–Kulyab coalition effectively ensured the exclusion of the Garm Tajiks (those who live or have their origins in the Garm Valley) and the Pamiris from the most important power structures in Dushanbe. Economic power followed the same pattern as political power and, during the Soviet period, Leninabad received a far greater share of investment capital than southern Tajikistan.

After the failed August 1991 coup in Moscow, opposition to the Tajik political status quo, long suppressed by force, assumed an open and confrontational form. In September and October, the opposition staged a number of demonstrations in front of the main government buildings in Dushanbe. On the surface, this confrontation appeared to

be purely ideological, pitting the communist structures of power against an opposing coalition of national-democrat (principally Rastokhez and the Tajik Democratic Party) and Islamist (the IRP) parties. In reality, the ideological struggle was only ever a thin veneer for a regional power struggle. The Leninabad–Kulyab coalition remained faithful to the Communist Party which had assured its privileged hold on power; the opposing regions promoted Tajik nationalism and the ideal of an Islamic state to attack the traditional ruling establishment's allegiance to an atheist internationalist ideology and its subservience to the imperial dictates of Moscow and Tashkent.

The demonstrations in Dushanbe during September and October 1991 set a pattern which continued throughout 1992.[3] Attempts to resolve the crisis were continually undermined both by the failure of the government to fulfil its earlier promises of reform, and by the opposition making new and more uncompromising demands. A major escalation of the crisis took place in May 1992 when the opposition forces, amassing thousands of demonstrators outside the parliament building, secured significant concessions from President Nabiyev, including the formation of a new government with positions reserved for the opposition. The refusal of Leninabad and Kulyab to accept the legitimacy of the new government initiated a more violent phase of the conflict. In June, fighting started in the Vakhsh Valley in the south of the country, a region with much inter-regional and inter-ethnic mixing. The fighting was initially an exercise in ethnic cleansing, causing more mass migration movements than large numbers of casualties.[4] Later, the conflict escalated to a new intensity when the Democrat–Islamist coalition, increasingly dominated by Islamists, overthrew Nabiyev on 7 September and formed a fragile new government, which only had control of about 20% of the country. By the winter of 1992, an all-out civil war was raging which ultimately caused over 10,000 deaths and created over 500,000 displaced people and refugees.[5]

It was only when this escalating violence threatened to spiral out of control that Russia and the neighbouring Central Asian states started actively to consider intervention in Tajik affairs. Until the autumn of 1992, Russia had shown little inclination to be involved, despite the presence in Tajikistan of the Russian forces of the 201st Division. These forces were ordered to remain neutral and their depleted units were not reinforced. However, in September 1992 a significant change of policy took place. A major factor in this change was the forceful warnings of Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, who asserted that Russia had a continuing obligation to be the 'guarantor of stability' in Central

Asia and that if it continued to neglect its 'strategic interests in [the region] its southern borders could directly face Islamic countries'.[6]

The clear implication was that if Russia failed to act in Tajikistan, Islamic fundamentalism would spread like wildfire and Russia would be confronted by a hostile and aggressive Muslim bloc on its sensitive southern underbelly. The Russian military, in particular, found Karimov's argument highly persuasive. Pavel Grachev was convinced that if the Tajik opposition had succeeded in 'turning Tajikistan into an Islamic state . . . the further penetration of Islamic fundamentalism ought to be expected to the north – Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and further. It ought not be forgotten that there are 20 million Muslims in Russia. If we do not extinguish the flames of war in Tajikistan, it could have more dangerous consequences for Russia than the aggressive mood presently existing in Chechnia'.[7] The Russian military's determination not to be forced to make a further strategic retreat, as had happened as a result of the turmoil in the Caucasus, also argued for swift preventive intervention.

In November 1992, Russia decided to act in close coordination with Uzbekistan. At first, attempts were made to foster a process of national reconciliation by establishing a new coalition between the warring Tajik parties. However, once it became clear that the opposing parties were unwilling to compromise, the Russian–Uzbek mediators decided unconditionally to support the traditional ruling elite. On 16 November a Supreme Soviet session was reconvened in Khujand, which elected a new government dominated by the Kulyab and Leninabad clans. Political mediation was then followed by military intervention. The new government launched an offensive against the opposition armed formations, relying on the firepower of the 201st Division, the overhead support of the Uzbek air force and supplies of heavy weaponry from Uzbekistan.[8] The result was a bloody success – the opposition forces were driven from Dushanbe into the Pamir mountains and over 80,000 refugees were forced to flee into Afghanistan.

The Russian and Uzbek intervention had imposed a military solution and had essentially restored the traditional Soviet political status quo. But it had barely touched the deeper sources of the conflict. On 13 July 1993, this was bloodily confirmed by the attack on a Tajik–Russian border post, which resulted in the deaths of over 20 Russian border guards. The ferocity of the attack highlighted the continuing strength of the Tajik opposition forces which were operating freely from Afghanistan and were being increasingly radicalised. The incident also strengthened the position of the more astute diplomats and politicians in Moscow who had argued that only a political solution

could ultimately ensure stability in Tajikistan. In response, Yeltsin convened a Russian–Central Asian summit in August to promote political dialogue between the different Tajik factions and to secure a coordinated Russian and Central Asian policy towards the country.

Despite these efforts, the prospects for a political settlement in Tajikistan will probably remain slim. Its government has shown little willingness to share power, preferring to silence dissent through repression, whilst the opposition forces have consistently refused to deal directly with the government. But it would be premature to depict the Russian involvement as a repetition of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Russia's control of the military situation in Tajikistan is far more secure than it ever was in Afghanistan, and the costs of ensuring an armed peace are correspondingly lower. Furthermore, the Russian resolve to keep Tajikistan within its sphere of influence is powerfully entrenched and supported by most of the political spectrum. Other Central Asian states also view the Russian commitment to Tajikistan as an essential post-imperial obligation and a yardstick by which to judge Russia's commitment to Central Asian security. In general, Tajikistan looks likely to remain an essentially Russian protectorate, dependent on Russia for economic aid and for its internal and external security.

In terms of their wider regional implications, the Tajik developments exposed the political and social divisions present in the other Central Asian states. They revealed the salience of regional divisions and the failure of either nationalism or Islam to heal them. Tajik nationalism was manipulated by the opposition southern groups through their claim that the northern Tajiks in Leninabad had been culturally 'Turkified' by the large Uzbek community living amongst them. Islam was potentially a more sustainable integrative force, but ultimately proved to be just as divisive. Qazi Akbar Turanzhoda, the spiritual leader of the country, was a respected national figure, but he was adamantly opposed by the main mullah of Kulyab, Khaydar Sharifzoda, who supported the communist government. Once the Qazi made known his support for the opposition, Sharifzoda secured the secession of the Kulyab religious establishment from the Qazi's jurisdiction. For its part, the IRP became predominantly the preserve of the Garm Tajiks – a vehicle for a regional rather than an all-inclusive Tajik identity.

Even though Islam failed to override the internal Tajik divisions, a radical politicised Islam emerged out of the crisis as the most effective opposition force. As the conflict escalated during 1992, the Tajik nationalist-democratic groups gradually ceded influence to the Islamist

groups who were more successful in mobilising the rural poor and the disaffected urban youth. The Islamist message also became progressively more radicalised as younger leaders emerged to challenge the traditional and more pragmatic religious hierarchy. For example, the guerrilla leader Abdugafur led one of the most successful Islamist fighting formations and was unconstrained in his demands for an immediate Islamic state.[9] After the Russian–Uzbek intervention, the power of the more radical Islamist elements can only be strengthened as they gain the support of pan-Islamic agencies and respond to the Islamic rhetoric of the Afghan mujaheddin.

For the other Central Asian countries, the Tajik civil war provided a powerful demonstration effect, offering an object lesson in the potential dangers of unravelling the Soviet-inherited structures of power. For the ruling elite of these states, the principal lessons of the crisis were decidedly conservative. In their eyes, many of the causes of the conflict were due to the upsurge in the rhetoric of liberalism, democracy and religious freedom. This led them to conclude that, to prevent a collapse of the state as in Tajikistan, it was essential to protect the coercive powers of the state and to stifle at birth any rapid diffusion of power. Nowhere has this been felt more strongly than in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan – stability at all costs

President Islam Karimov was the most concerned and the most influential of the Central Asian leaders during the Tajik crisis. Many factors underlay his concern: Uzbekistan's proximity to Tajikistan and its traditional geo-political responsibilities; the fact that over one million Uzbeks (almost 23% of the population) live in Tajikistan; and Karimov's personal antipathy to any manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism. These coalesced into an overwhelming fear that the Tajik crisis might spread and be reproduced within Uzbekistan, leading to social and political anarchy. It was to avoid the 'Tajik Scenario' that Karimov has elevated stability to the highest political virtue, for which almost no cost is too expensive to bear.

Karimov's fears are not unjustified, even if the Uzbeks can be reasonably satisfied by Stalin's generous drawing of their state's borders. As in Tajikistan, strong regional separatisms represent a continual challenge to central power in Tashkent. Like the Tajik fourfold scission, Uzbekistan has five major regional centres. In the contest for political power, three have historically been the most significant – the south with Samarkand and Bukhara (the historic centres of the Bukharan khanate), the west in the Ferghana Valley (the successor to the Kokand khanate) and the capital Tashkent.[10]

Since the Khrushchev period, Samarkand and Bukhara have tended to dominate the political scene. Not only does Karimov's political support come from this region, but so did Sharaf Rashidov's, the long-serving Uzbek leader during the Brezhnev era. Rashidov unashamedly promoted his home base, surrounding himself with family and kinsmen from his region to the exclusion of all other regions. Despite Rashidov's partisan policies, the Ferghana Valley's regional power was never completely overcome and it has remained the strongest alternative centre of political power. As a region, it has some similarities with the Garm area of Tajikistan. A predominantly agricultural society, the Ferghana Valley is the most traditional and religious part of Uzbekistan. Since the onset of *perestroika*, the numbers of mosques and religious schools have multiplied, the Uzbek branch of the IRP has consolidated a strong popular base and a number of Islamist vigilante groups have emerged. These groups, given the title of *Adolat* (justice), acted as a form of local religious police, protecting local neighbourhoods (*mahalla*) from crime and ensuring that Islamic codes of moral conduct were followed. Tashkent is the third major political centre in Uzbekistan. Its power is connected to its domination of the trade sector and the 'shadow' economy. Although weaker than the other two competing regions and not in a position to seize power independently, it can play an important intermediary role and its support can be critical in determining any power struggle. The capital is also the main base of the national-democratic groups, Birlik and Erk.

Karimov's strategy to avoid a Tajik-style intra-regional struggle for central power has been to act quickly and decisively to concentrate power in his own hands. He ensured that all the major institutions of state were under his direct control. The parliament or Supreme Soviet was reduced to a powerless rump, obediently ratifying a new constitution in October 1992 which ensured untrammelled presidential power. The new constitution dissolved the regional Soviets and replaced them with a governorate system based on regional *hakims* (governors). These *hakims* are personally selected by Karimov and any sign of regional independence is suppressed by the immediate sacking of the *hakim* and a general purging of the ranks of the regional administration. During 1992 and early 1993, there were full-scale changes in personnel in five of the eleven oblasts in Uzbekistan.[11]

Karimov's cadre policy has similarly been carefully designed to ensure absolute loyalty. Demonstrating a greater subtlety than his predecessor Rashidov, he has promoted figures from all the major regional clans, carefully balancing their respective claims, but ensuring that all those selected are personally loyal to him and do not

represent any potential challenge to his power. These officials have little independent decision-making power. As an example, every export sale of cotton over 1,000 tonnes has to be personally approved by the president.[12]

Parallel to this creation of an authoritarian, centralised power structure, Karimov has engaged in a sustained campaign to undermine all sources of potential opposition to his power. The national-democratic groups were initially given the greatest formal freedom. This was partly because they were well known internationally and their suppression in the early days of independence would have harmed Uzbekistan's chances of acceptance by the international community. But Karimov also knew that they were relatively weak and lacked a mass following, being mainly limited to the urban Uzbek intelligentsia. The leader of Erk, Muhammad Solih, was even allowed to contest the presidential elections in November 1991. However, once Karimov felt more secure in his power, the leaders of Birlik and Erk were subjected to physical attacks, periods of imprisonment and enforced emigration.[13] In their place, Karimov created his own hand-picked opposition party, the Homeland Party, which has been steadfastly loyal to the government.

Unlike his initial tolerance of a nationalist-democrat opposition, Karimov has never wavered in his hostility towards Islamist political groups. His fear was not only that such groups had a potentially much wider mass base, given the traditional high regard for Islam amongst the rural Uzbek population, but also that the centre of the more assertive Islamic movements was in the major potential competitor for central power – the Ferghana Valley. After carefully biding his time, in March 1992 Karimov began a widespread suppression of the *Adolat* vigilante groups and the IRP cells in the Ferghana Valley.[14] At the same time, missionaries from Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries were expelled from Uzbek territory. Karimov has subsequently attempted to ensure that the Islamic life of the country is carefully controlled and directed by the official and state-sponsored Muslim hierarchy, the Muftiate.

The Uzbek president has used the same mix of cautious timing, skilful manipulation and brutal repression to undermine other sources of opposition. In October 1991, his vice-president, Shukrullo Mirsaidov, who was closely connected to the Tashkent clan, attempted to instigate a constitutional coup to oust Karimov. Although Mirsaidov gained the support of 200 Supreme Soviet delegates, Karimov managed to survive a vote of no-confidence intact.[15] Mirsaidov was subsequently stripped of all his political power. In January 1992, students in

Tashkent rioted in opposition to the liberalisation of prices, and demanded the resignation of the government. These riots were suppressed by force with estimates of 6 killed and 30 injured.[16] Tashkent University was then considerably reduced in size and new provincial universities were established. Other potential opposition forces, such as the Tajik organisation Samarkand or the pan-Turkic Turkestan Party, have been the same hapless victims of Karimov's repressive clampdown.

By the end of the first year of Uzbekistan's independence, Karimov could be reasonably secure in the knowledge that opposition to his rule had been silenced. The cost of this repression was a regime characterised by suspicion and xenophobia, with an internal security force as strong and pervasive as it had ever been during the Soviet period. The outside world was treated with similar suspicion, as both Islamic and pro-democracy Western governments were treated with disdain. When former US Secretary of State James Baker visited Tashkent and recommended a dialogue with Birlik and Erk, Karimov bluntly told him not to interfere in Uzbekistan's internal affairs.[17]

Despite these highly repressive practices, Karimov's autocratic rule has gained widespread support. The appeal of democracy or a liberal political system was widely discredited by the anarchy and bloody confrontation in neighbouring Tajikistan. A majority of Uzbek citizens have accepted, if reluctantly, Karimov's argument that political stability requires strong central power. The appeal of law and order has also had a clear economic dimension in the face of the post-Soviet economic collapse – to protect living standards and provide a stable political environment for securing economic growth.

Karimov himself clearly understands that it is the economy, not politics, which is his primary challenge and which will ultimately consolidate or undermine his continued hold on power. Primarily because of this, Karimov has passionately argued against the 'shock therapy' approach to economic reform and has adopted a far more conservative policy. He has preserved many of the old Soviet economic structures and coined the popular saying that 'you don't build a new house by destroying the old one'. His defence of this economic conservatism has rested on the social dangers of too fast a pace of reform in a society which is predominantly rural, poor and overpopulated, and where over 40% of Uzbeks are children. On the statistical evidence for 1992, Karimov can claim that his policies have been partially successful, at least relative to the other former Soviet republics where production has declined more precipitately and inflation has increased at a higher rate (see Table 4). Also in his favour is the fact

Table 4: Decline in Production and Inflation in 1992

	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Turkmenistan	Tajikistan
% decline in gross national product	14	13	26	15	31
% inflation	1,540	840	1,760	980	1,450

Source: *Kommersant-Deyli*, 19 February 1993.

that Uzbekistan's budget deficit in 1992 was kept at less than 5% and external reserves were built up through the deposit of gold in Swiss banks.

Karimov has only been able to record these successes by relying on the old Soviet methods of economic coercion and by avoiding the introduction of real economic reforms. A few steps in the right direction have been taken, but they have tended to become bogged down by bureaucratic inertia and a preference for paper rather than real privatisation. Karimov's cadre policy of selecting loyal but incompetent apparatchiks who are unable to sanction anything without their patron's approval, is also a major structural obstacle to reform.

Ultimately, Uzbekistan's economic future depends on the government biting the bullet of genuine economic reform and freeing the economy from the cold embrace of governmental bureaucracy. This will be the test of the next few years for the Karimov government. If severe economic deterioration were to occur, the hand of the opposition would be strengthened. If dissatisfaction were to be expressed, it would probably first appear through the demand for greater regional independence, which would then develop into an ideologically motivated challenge for central power. The most likely scenario would be opposition from dominant clans from the Ferghana Valley and frustrated merchant groups from Tashkent, which might be backed up by the mobilising ideology of Islam with the implicit support of national-democratic groups. It is hard to imagine that such a challenge would not be opposed by force. The ensuing conflict would probably be even bloodier than the events in Tajikistan. Given Uzbekistan's central geopolitical position and the size of its population, this would have serious regional implications far more difficult to contain than the Tajik crisis.

Although these scenarios cannot be discounted, the strength of Karimov's position should not be underestimated. In the two years since independence he has consolidated a strong internal position and

the opposition is cowed and weak. The economy of Uzbekistan also need not necessarily descend to the level of a sub-Saharan African state. It may not have the riches of Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan, but it does have an adequate agricultural base, a relatively rich hydrocarbon and mineral supply, and a small but potentially effective industrial sector. Karimov is not economically illiterate and has a basic understanding of the direction that the Uzbek economy needs to go. If he can ensure at least a modicum of economic stability, he will be in a good position to project Uzbekistan as a regional power and consolidate his personal stature as the father of Uzbek independence and the guarantor of social peace.

Turkmenistan – a potential Kuwait?

During the Soviet period, the Turkmen republic was one of the most ignored and underdeveloped regions of the Soviet Union. It had many features in common with Tajikistan – a small population in an inhospitable terrain under the political shadow of its more powerful Uzbek neighbour to the north. However, in striking contrast to Tajikistan, independence for Turkmenistan has reversed this position. By the end of 1993, the country was blessed with political stability, an economy which had weathered the post-Soviet recession, and a degree of international recognition unimaginable a few years earlier.

One of the sources of Turkmenistan's inner strength has been the cohesiveness of the social and political structures of the state. Unlike the Stalinist formations of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the Turkmen nation-state formation was not as marked by inter-ethnic divisions and was established in a way which more successfully satisfied the demands of the inter-tribal political structures. Turkmen society is dominated by approximately 100 tribes which form seven larger tribal groupings.[18] The administrative divisions in Turmenistan basically mirror these tribal groupings and thus consolidate internal stability. There are, certainly, inter-tribal conflicts with the Tekke from around the capital Ashgabat and the Salor from the east traditionally being the major contestants for central power.[19] But the absence of a strong Islamist movement and the weakness of the national-democratic opposition helps to contain and limit these inter-tribal contradictions.

The ease with which Niyazov has managed to stamp his personal control on the running of the state reflects the absence of a strong internal opposition. Although originally from the Tekke tribe, Niyazov has sought to project himself as a figure transcending the tribal divisions of the country. He has emphasised his upbringing as an orphan and has unashamedly promoted a cult of personality, presenting himself as the Turkmenbashi or father of the Turkmen people. The Turkmen press endlessly praises his virtues, portraits of the leader are omnipresent in the country, and streets, farms and factories have been renamed in his honour. Despite this blatant self-promotion, Niyazov appears to have considerable popular support and internal legitimacy. His status as the first genuine Turkmen khan, his sensitivity to tradition and his respect for elders and tribal consensus strike a far stronger national chord than the demands of the small indigenous national-democratic groups for Western-style democracy.

Niyazov's strength has been further consolidated by the healthy economic prospects of his country. With its small population of under four million, Turkmenistan has been blessed with extensive reserves of gas and oil (see Table 2). Unlike his immediate neighbours, Niyazov has had the financial means to make the economic transition to independence relatively painless. He has been able to promote a comprehensive social welfare policy and has kept the prices for basic foodstuffs far lower than the other Central Asian states.[20] Because of its financial and social stability, Turkmenistan was the first country in the former Soviet Union to emerge from recession; it showed a 6% growth rate for the first few months of 1993 in comparison with the same period in 1992.[21] In late 1993, Turkmenistan confidently introduced its own national currency.

As with his counterpart in Uzbekistan, Niyazov appeared vulnerable to his seeming devotion to the old Soviet command system, with a potential opposition emerging from the frustrated entrepreneurial class. During 1993, Niyazov revealed that he was not adverse to economic restructuring, so long as it was done in a cautious and incremental fashion. He reversed his earlier commitment not to permit private ownership of land and gave farmers the right to own 50 hectares and to lease up to 500 hectares on a long-term basis.[22] With the introduction of a new currency Niyazov has also permitted a more open business environment which has attracted Western and other foreign interest, especially in the development of the hydrocarbon industry.[23] These signs of economic activity and growth have undoubtedly added to Niyazov's personal popularity. His administration has constantly asserted, with considerable national pride, that in time Turkmenistan will be a second Kuwait.

Turkmen popularly believe that any threat to their country is more likely to come from outside than from inside. They fear neighbouring poorer powers who might become increasingly jealous of the country's national wealth. Such threats are perceived to come not only from the revolutionary Islamic state of Iran and the turbulent anarchy emanating

from Afghanistan. There is also a deeply embedded distrust of the Uzbeks and their historical presumption of a hegemonic regional role. There is a widespread fear that the Uzbeks, possibly in an alliance with the Russians, might seek to reimpose imperial control and expropriate Turkmenistan's national wealth. It is mainly for this reason that Niyazov has been such a lukewarm supporter of the CIS, arguing that it should follow the minimalist Group of Seven (G-7) model, where 'leading figures agree on a conceptual level on two to three especially significant questions'.[24] He has been the odd man out in Central Asia in his refusal to countenance a CIS political or military union.

Niyazov's strategy to protect Turkmenistan's independence includes a highly pragmatic foreign-policy approach. Even prior to independence, Niyazov ignored warnings from the United States, Russia and other Central Asian states and developed close relations with Iran. At the same time, he began a close relationship with Turkey, but was careful to balance this with good bilateral relations with Uzbekistan and Russia. Although Niyazov declined to develop multilateral CIS relations, he did consent to a number of bilateral agreements with Russia, most notably those covering the Russian military and security presence in Turkmenistan. These concessions to Russia are clearly the most politically difficult for Niyazov since they are the most visible manifestation of an incomplete national independence. For a people which has been described as having an 'immense superiority complex', these concessions can be seen as a sign of capitulation to Russian neo-imperialism.[25]

The critical question for Niyazov and his future is whether he can continue this fine diplomatic balancing act to protect Turkmenistan's independence in its potentially hostile external environment. Using a Persian Gulf analogy, it is a question of whether he can avoid the mistakes of the Sabah dynasty in Kuwait and follow the example of the more subtle, inclusive foreign policies which have characterised the long-term strategy of Sultan Qaboos in Oman. On the evidence of the two years since independence, Niyazov has shown that he is temperamentally closer to Qaboos than Sabah.

Kyrgyzstan – the radical option

Like Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan has a small population. However, the fragile internal constitution of the country and the weakness of its economy, makes its condition closer to Tajikistan than Turkmenistan. Like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan represents a complex mosaic of different ethnic groups, discrete regional identities and inter-clan tensions and contradictions.

According to the 1989 census, the ethnic Kyrgyz only just constituted an absolute majority of around 52% of the country's population. Since the late Gorbachev period, there has been a resurgence of Kyrgyz national self-assertion, closely associated with the promotion of its language and culture. The Kyrgyz national movement has also had a distinct economic dimension since the Kyrgyz are one of the poorest ethnic groups in the country, despite their titular national status. Being traditionally pastoral mountain nomads, other Central Asian nationalities, such as the Uzbeks, Tajiks and Uighurs, have dominated the lowland agriculture and Slavic peoples have represented most of the workforce in the industrial sector. These non-Kyrgyz nationalities have effectively dominated the Kyrgyz economy.

The resurgence of Kyrgyz nationalism has naturally alarmed the other more prosperous national minorities. The large Slav and German population, representing 30% at the 1989 census, have become increasingly concerned about perceived Kyrgyz discrimination in areas such as language, employment and education. From 1988 to 1992, over 300,000 Russians emigrated from the country, resulting in the Russian proportion of Kyrgyzstan's population dropping from 21% to 18%.

However, Slav–Kyrgyz tensions have been relatively amicable compared to Kyrgyz relations with the half-million Uzbeks who dominate the town and region around Osh at the eastern end of the Ferghana Valley. These Uzbeks are the traditional inhabitants of the city, but have increasingly come into conflict with the Kyrgyz who have moved from their mountainous pastures to settle in the crowded lowlands. In 1990, tensions in Osh between the two communities broke out into the bloodiest inter-ethnic fighting of the Gorbachev era in Central Asia, with over 320 deaths officially reported. Mutual distrust and suspicion continue to plague relations, with Kyrgyz frustration matched by a growing indigenous Uzbek campaign for Osh to be joined with Uzbekistan.[26]

Despite the difficult inter-ethnic environment, the Kyrgyz are not free from internal tribal divisions. The most destabilising of these is the historic and cultural divide between the Kyrgyz in the south and north of the country. The southern Kyrgyz around the Ferghana Valley have historically been influenced by their contacts with Uzbeks, Tajiks and Uighurs. In an economically undeveloped and poor region, they have maintained their traditional customs and ways of life and are resistant to major economic or political reforms. In contrast, the Kyrgyz in the north have been in closer contact with the immigrant Slav population and have had to adapt to a rapid process of industrialisation and agricultural development. The northern Kyrgyz are gener-

ally less traditional, more Westernised and more receptive to the challenges of radical political and economic reform.[27]

Since the disastrous Osh massacre in 1990, inter-ethnic and inter-Kyrgyz relations in Kyrgyzstan have remained remarkably calm, in spite of the social and economic tensions which surfaced after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The stewardship of President Askar Akayev, and his unconventional political approach, must be given some of the credit for this. Unlike all other Central Asian leaders, he was not closely connected to the Communist Party ruling elite, although he was a member of the Kyrgyz Central Committee. He also had no strong connections with any elite clan group. This relative freedom has given him greater political flexibility than his other Central Asian colleagues. In his cadre selection, Akayev has attempted to advance those with technocratic skills rather than with a proper tribal lineage. Against strong Kyrgyz nationalist pressures, Akayev has also consistently pressed for private ownership of land, open to all ethnic groups, and a rapid transition to a market economy. In his political and social policies, Akayev has publicly committed himself to a liberal and democratic system. Compared to other Central Asian states, with the partial exception of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz press is free and outspoken, and opposition political movements and parties are permitted to operate without strong external restraints.

Kyrgyzstan's democratic image should not be blown out of proportion. Akayev's picturesque depiction of Kyrgyzstan as the 'Asian Switzerland' is more an aspiration than a reality. There are few checks against presidential power, opposition parties are barely developed and have little influence on policy-making, and inter-clan interests continue to determine Kyrgyz politics. Yet, in the Central Asian context, Akayev's pro-Western democratic orientation is a refreshing contrast to the general political culture.

Akayev's radical policy prescriptions do leave him vulnerable to internal opposition. Like its Russian counterpart, the parliament under the chairmanship of Sherimkulov Medetkhan is a focus for conservative and Kyrgyz nationalist opposition. It has consistently attempted to undermine Akayev's ethnic policies by promoting Kyrgyz nationalist claims, such as that all land should remain the sole property of the Kyrgyz people.[28] The parliament has also institutionalised the north–south divide in the Kyrgyz nation with deputies from the south voting together in opposition to the government's proposals.

Akayev's greatest vulnerability has been the structural weakness of the Kyrgyz economy which has few natural resources or competitive products. Not only were essential Russian subsidies lost with the

disintegration of the Soviet Union, but there was no effective way of insulating the Kyrgyz economy from the inflationary policies of the Russian government. By the end of 1992, the Kyrgyz government had effectively lost control of macro-economic policy and the economy was collapsing. The opposition, from both the communist and democrat sides, justifiably condemned the government for its lack of a viable economic policy. In this situation, Akayev really had no option but to seek radical solutions to the overwhelming pressures on the Kyrgyz economy. On 14 May 1993, Kyrgyzstan became the first country in Central Asia to leave the rouble zone and introduce its own national currency. This move was made in close cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which had unofficially made clear that the introduction of the currency was a necessary precondition for international funds of around $300–400m which foreign donors had promised to help stabilise the Kyrgyz economy.[29]

Akayev's political future is principally dependent on the success or failure of economic reform. The political risks should not be underestimated. In any restructuring of Kyrgyzstan's industry, there will be large-scale unemployment which will most affect the Slav community. Similarly, land reform, especially if it includes private ownership, can never satisfy equally the demands of all the ethnic groups in the country. For the Kyrgyz, who see the land as their communal birthright, even the idea of selling it to non-Kyrgyz ethnic groups is unacceptable. All of this could lead to inter-ethnic conflict, pitting Kyrgyz against Russian, Uzbek or Tajik.

In the medium term, the memory of the events in Osh in 1990 and the Tajik civil war in 1992 will probably continue to act as a deterrent to violent inter-ethnic confrontation. A more insidious threat could come from within the Kyrgyz nation. An accelerated economic reform programme might encourage a schism between the north and south of the country. Southern Kyrgyz leaders might use their opposition to Bishkek's economic reform programme to expand their local powers and to integrate the southern economy with the other parts of the Ferghana Valley, thereby falling under Uzbekistan's sphere of influence. Akayev, or his successor, would then be left with effective control of only the northern parts of Kyrgyzstan and would be forced to seek closer integration with Kazakhstan and Russia.

The prospects for such a schism should not be exaggerated. The fear of Uzbek domination does more to unify the Kyrgyz than to accentuate their differences. However, the economic challenge facing Akayev's government is still critical. If the Kyrgyz economy fails to stabilise,

there would be serious doubts that Kyrgyzstan could ever be a viable independent economic, and thus political, entity.

Kazakhstan – the divided state

In traditional Soviet classification, Kazakhstan was treated as an entity separate from Central Asia. The post-independence Kazakh leadership has been anxious to reassert Kazakhstan's Central Asian credentials. At the Central Asian Summit in January 1993 it was agreed that the Soviet term of Middle Asia (*srednaya aziya*), which had excluded Kazakhstan, should be replaced by Central Asia (*tsentralnaya aziya*), which would include all five states of the region.

Geographically and historically, the Kazakh territories are indisputably part of Central Asia. Yet the Soviet classification did have a justifiable logic. To a greater extent than the other states of Central Asia, Kazakhstan was subject to intensive Russian settlement from the nineteenth century onwards. In the 1989 census the indigenous Kazakhs, numbering 6.5m or 40% of the population, only barely exceeded the ethnic Russian community of 6.2m (38%). When the other non-Russian European communities are considered, the non-Central Asian population constituted over 50% of all those living in the country.[30] This division between the European and Kazakh communities also has a clear geographical expression with the northern oblasts constituting large Slav majorities and the Kazakhs dominating the southern parts of the country. The north–south divide is further complicated by a town–country dimension with many Kazakhs living in the countryside in the north and many Russians residing in southern Kazakh towns. When the presence of over 100 other nationalities is added to the picture, Kazakhstan can truly be described as the Bosnia-Herzegovina of the former Soviet Union.

The presence of 108 SS-18 intercontinental missiles on Kazakh soil additionally set Kazakhstan apart from the other Central Asian states. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, like Ukraine, received a stream of high-level Western politicians, who implicitly conferred a special strategic significance on the country through their overriding concern over its future nuclear strategy. Even without nuclear weapons, the vast territory of Kazakhstan and its critical geostrategic position between China and Russia give the country an especially important strategic position.

This blaze of publicity followed a long period when the outside world had paid little attention to Kazakhstan. The Kazakhs were generally regarded as one of the most loyal and least nationalistic of the peoples of the Soviet Union. After independence, this was shown to be more the result of Kazakh dissimulation than the lack of a strong Kazakh nationalism. Liberated from the Soviet embrace, the Kazakhs have viewed the creation of an independent state as a historic vindication of their national rights. The memory of the brutality of Soviet rule has added to the depth of Kazakh nationalist feeling.[31] It is bitterly recalled that half of the Kazakh nation perished or were forced into exile during the Soviet period and that land was forcibly sequestrated to satisfy the demands of the Slav immigrants. The sense of historic injustice breeds an assertive, even shrill, form of nationalist self-aggrandisement with a markedly anti-Russian flavour.[32] Russian and Soviet policies are regularly claimed to be genocidal and depicted as the cause of the desperate condition of the Kazakhs. Cultural and historical 'de-russification' is pursued even in areas where Kazakh culture and traditions have been deeply affected by Russian influences. Many Kazakh nationalists see the possession of nuclear weapons as a vital defence against any future re-emergence of Russian imperialism.

Such an assertive nationalist agenda necessarily provokes a negative and defensive response from the other non-indigenous ethnic groups. Russian nationalist groups, like the growing Cossack movement, have gained in popularity, asserting their historic claims to territories in northern Kazakhstan.[33] The more moderate sections of the Russian community may have been less provocative, but are increasingly alienated by such moves as the renaming of Russian towns and streets; the denigration of Russian culture in comparison with Kazakh; and, most emotively, the promotion of Kazakh as the state language. Since only 1% of the Russian-speaking population has any fluency in the language this has been seen as a transparently discriminatory policy. Discrimination has also been felt in numerous other areas, such as employment, education and housing.[34] The most open and worrying display of Slav dissatisfaction occurred in the city of Ust-Kamenogorsk on 7 December 1992, when a meeting of 15,000 Slavs demanded that Russian be a state language alongside Kazakh. There were also ominous threats of the creation of a Trans-Irtysh republic, modelled on the lines of the Trans-Dniestr republic in Moldova, if their demands were not satisfied.[35]

The inter-ethnic divisions in Kazakhstan are a major source of tension and potential instability in the country. But there are also certain self-imposed restraints on the two dominant communities which limit the promotion of their respective demands. The vast majority of the Kazakhs and Russians have a perceived mutual interest in

continuing a policy of accommodation rather than confrontation. For the Kazakhs, this is based on the understanding that time and demography are ultimately on their side. The Kazakh birth rate is far higher than that of the Russians; over 80% of all teenagers in the country are Kazakh; and the immigration of the diaspora Kazakhs is gradually replacing emigrating Russians. As early as the year 2000, Kazakhs could constitute over 50% of the country and form an absolute majority.[36] There is, therefore, a sense that it is better to let time do its work rather than unnecessarily alienate the Russian community through an aggressive Kazakh nationalist policy. On a more fundamental level, the Kazakhs are more than aware that the overall balance of power is overwhelmingly on the Russian side and any open confrontation would be senseless.

Many Kazakhs also understand that, in addition to achieving a quantitative numerical majority, they need to consolidate a stronger and more cohesive national identity. As with other Central Asian nationalities, the Kazakhs maintain strong tribal and regional allegiances. These are broadly grouped into three tribal confederations or hordes (*juz*) with distinct geographical extensions. The Greater Horde is based in the south and most confidently espouses Kazakh national claims. Traditionally, leaders from this Horde, including President Nazarbayev, have dominated the Kazakh political structures. The Middle Horde comes from the northern and central parts of Kazakhstan and is more cautious in its nationalist ambitions and more 'russified' in its culture and outlook. The Smaller Horde is to be found in the east of the country, traditionally the poorest and least powerful area, but now with all the potential riches of Kazakhstan's oil wealth. The historic suspicions and the different outlooks and ambitions of the three tribal groupings are a major obstacle to the development of a Kazakh nationalist identity. More astute Kazakhs also realise that the Russians could, as they did in the past, use the tactics of 'divide and rule' in any direct confrontation.[37]

The Russians in Kazakhstan have, however, shown little desire to allow relations with the Kazakhs to deteriorate that far. Many of the ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan, especially those whose families have lived for generations in the country, have themselves a weakly formed Russian national identity. As Asian Russians, they feel differentiated from the Russians on the other side of the Urals. In general, they are happy to live as citizens of Kazakhstan so long as their basic rights are protected. Stability, peace and economic growth are their overarching ambitions. There is little will or desire for an Algerian-style civil war which would lead to open confrontation with the Kazakhs. In Moscow,

there is a similarly pragmatic commitment to amicable Kazakh–Russian relations, since increased hostility could act as a catalyst for a deterioration of Russian relations with the Turkic Central Asian peoples, many of whom live within the borders of the Russian Federation.

Nazarbayev has been able to capitalise on this underlying spirit of inter-ethnic moderation to pursue policies which generally satisfy both the Kazakh and Russian-speaking communities. This can be most clearly seen in the tortuous negotiations leading to the adoption of the constitution of Kazakhstan in January 1993. On the language question, a compromise was reached whereby Kazakh was made the state language, but Russian was given the status of the language of inter-ethnic communication. Nazarbayev also managed to block the Kazakh nationalist demand that the President of Kazakhstan should be an ethnic Kazakh. The final wording of the constitution was that the president was only required to be fluent in the Kazakh language. A compromise was also reached on the issue of dual citizenship, which was permitted on condition that the other concerned state would reciprocate this right for Kazakh citizens. Finally, Kazakh concerns over Russian secessionism were reassured by the definition of the Kazakh state as a unitary one.[38]

In defining Kazakhstan's relations with Russia, Nazarbayev has similarly attempted to take a moderate and unprovocative path. Initially, it looked as if Nazarbayev might follow Ukraine's example and seek to preserve Kazakhstan's nuclear capability.[39] However, he offered little resistance to the subsequent US and Russian blandishments and committed Kazakhstan to the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) I Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Although this position irked the more extreme Kazakh nationalists, Nazarbayev has been firm in not wanting to provoke Russia or the international community on this issue. He also realised that there was little practical sense in pursuing the nuclear question when it is inconceivable that Russia would ever renounce its full operational control of the weapons based in Kazakhstan.

The Russian dimension has also never been far away from Nazarbayev's approach to the CIS. Of all the CIS leaders Nazarbayev has been the most reluctant to see the Union structures unravel and has been the most outspoken advocate of closer CIS integration. In the period immediately following the failed August 1991 coup, Nazarbayev tried to slow the pace of separation and he made sure that Kazakhstan was the last non-Russian republic of the former Soviet Union to declare its independence. With similar resolve, Nazarbayev consistently fought for the preservation of integrated Soviet armed

forces and pursued an energetic defence of a common rouble zone. He only permitted the introduction of a new currency in November 1993 after Russia had imposed terms which were widely viewed as stripping Kazakhstan of any semblance of economic independence.

Such a zealous defence of the CIS has provoked Kazakh nationalist opposition. Yet the Kazakhs have been broadly reassured since, in practice, Nazarbayev's fine words on the attractions of the CIS have not materially affected the promotion and advancement of the Kazakh nationalist agenda. Even if they find Nazarbayev excessively deferential to the Russians, most Kazakhs accept that his pro-integrationist stance performs the useful function of reassuring the Russian community and suggesting that, if they need to find a scapegoat for their political isolation, they ought to look to the government in Moscow rather than in Almaty.

Although this might suggest a cynical attitude towards integration, Nazarbayev's own stance has principled roots, if laced with an element of personal ambition. He is genuinely convinced of the need to maintain the close links between the Turkic and Slavic worlds which he believes represent 'a Slavic–Turkic community, whether you like it or not. We don't want to lose it. It constitutes our strength'.[40] Nazarbayev was initially deeply shocked by the promotion of a purely Slavic union at the Russian–Belarusian–Ukrainian agreement to establish the CIS in December 1991. At that time, Nazarbayev recalled, 'the talk was of Slavs getting together. And the Muslims would now also get together separately. The confrontation was at that time very dangerous and we were very close to it'.[41] Nazarbayev subsequently showed that he could play the same ethnic game as his European Slav colleagues. To Russia's clear alarm, in August 1992 he engineered a Kazakh–Tatar–Bashkir meeting, which concluded with a trilateral economic agreement. The implicit warning to Russia was that the Muslim and Turkic presence extended into the Russian Federation itself and there could be no easy separation of the two worlds.[42]

The element of personal ambition in Nazarbayev's integrationist zeal is grounded in the memory of his heightened international prestige from 1990–91, when he acted as a principal mediator for Gorbachev's attempts to forge a Union treaty. Nazarbayev's frequent assertions that Kazakhstan is 'in the centre of Asia and is on the road between Europe and Asia' can be interpreted as an attempt to retrieve this lost international stature. A strong CIS structure would strengthen Kazakhstan's position in Moscow, in Central Asia and in Asia generally. Nazarbayev's grandiose ambitions for Almaty to be the centre of an Asian security structure modelled on the Conference on Security and

Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) is part of his dream for Kazakhstan to be the nodal centre of the Eurasian landmass.[43]

Despite these regional ambitions, Nazarbayev has never taken his eyes off the more urgent tasks of ensuring political stability and, most importantly, promoting economic reform. In contrast to Ukraine, which has many structural similarities to Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev's successes in the economic field are his most striking achievements. In part this is due to the greater economic potential of the Kazakh economy with its rich natural resource base and relatively small population. But Nazarbayev must also be credited with creating a business environment which has attracted Western investment, as was confirmed by the successful conclusion in April 1993 of the Chevron deal for the development of the Tengiz oil fields. The Kazakh government has shown itself sufficiently committed to market reform to gain the support of the IMF and a credit of $86m to support its economic and financial programme for July 1993 to June 1994.[44] The rapidly growing trade relations with China, which represented 22.4% of trade turnover in 1993, also points to the decreasing dependence of Kazakhstan on the Russian market.[45]

Despite these developments, there are still formidable obstacles in the path of Kazakhstan's economic regeneration. Like other parts of the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan is still suffering decline. The introduction of the new Kazakh currency in November 1993 will require additional painful adjustments, even if, in the longer term, it will give the government greater fiscal control of the economy. Powerful internal opposition to privatisation and land reform remains and will continue to present difficult challenges. The tribal system of patronage is a powerful obstacle to economic rationalisation and liberalisation. But, the fact that there is some sense of direction in economic policy and a widespread popular expectation of greater economic prosperity in the future is a stabilising factor in Kazakhstan and strengthens Nazarbayev's political position. For the Russian-speaking community, it decreases the attraction of unsettling the political status quo. For the Kazakhs, it counsels a patient approach, allowing time and demography rather than violent conflict to attain their goal of consolidating a Kazakh state.

There are, therefore, cautious grounds for optimism for Kazakhstan's future. It has the potential to become one of the richest of the states of the former Soviet Union and there could emerge a common inter-ethnic agreement to preserve stability so as to share in this relative economic prosperity. Yet such optimistic projections must also be qualified. The strength of inter-ethnic suspicion and distrust

could undermine such scenarios. Even if outright conflict is avoided, the split personality of Kazakhstan will continue to weaken the country's geo-strategic coherence and influence. The substantial Russian-speaking community will inevitably look to Moscow rather than Almaty for its ultimate protection. The Kazakh community will also never completely lose its sensitivity about the integrity of its state and will be looking south for moral support from its Turkic kinsmen, from the rest of the Muslim world and perhaps even from China. Nazarbayev has shown himself to be a consummate juggler of the complex web of Kazakh inter-clan interests and claims and is ensuring relative harmony between the Kazakhs and other ethnic groups. However, his promotion of Kazakhstan as the secure bridge between East and West is fanciful. Kazakhstan is far more likely to resemble the troubled waters between East and West which will continue to require great political skills to chart a safe and peaceful course.

The mirage of regional integration

Even though the political unity of Central Asia has been a rare historical occurrence, the aspiration to forge a unified Turkestan has remained a deeply rooted and popular ideal. As with pan-Arabism, the idea of recreating a pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic unity in Central Asia has a powerful resonance. It offers a radical solution to the colonial legacy of the region, focusing on political disunity as the ultimate cause of the humiliation of colonial subjection, and unity as the key for the restoration of Central Asia's rightful political power and economic wealth. Memories of the great medieval period of Central Asian civilisation and the heroic struggle of the late-nineteenth-century reformers provide additional lustre to this drive for unity.

The leaders of Central Asia have tried to capture this populist ideal. Even before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there were moves to acquire a common Central Asian voice. In June 1990, the heads of the five republics held a first meeting in Alma-Ata and the concluding documents called for greater coordination in the political, economic and social spheres.[46] Such gatherings have since been a regular feature of the Central Asian political circuit. At the Tashkent Summit in January 1993, the movement towards Central Asian integration appeared to cross a new threshold. There were commitments of economic cooperation, coordination over ecological issues such as the Aral Sea, definition of a common policy towards war-ravaged Tajikistan, and even an agreement on creating a region-wide newspaper and television channel. Some Russian media reports dramatically announced the emergence of a unified Turkestan.[47]

In reality the Tashkent Summit was richer in rhetoric than in practical implementation and the momentum for regional integration has subsequently stalled. Plans for regional economic and financial coordination have only been partially implemented. Proposals for creating a regional newspaper and television channel have been paralysed by disputes over what language to use and by differing attitudes towards press freedom. Even in areas where regional cooperation has been unavoidable, such as the region's water supply or the Aral Sea crisis, there have been more gestures towards a comprehensive policy than genuine coordinated action. In general, the Central Asian states have found it easier to defend their sovereign independence than to join together to promote a common regional policy.

One reason for this is the disparity of power in the region and the depth of mutual suspicion. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are medium-sized powers with populations of around 20m whilst the other three states have much smaller populations of around 5m. No regional consensus has emerged on how these power differentials should be balanced and represented in any collective decision-making body. Both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan feel that they are the rightful leaders of any such entity. The Kazakh claim is based on the country's key position as the link between Asia and Europe and its proximity and close relations with Russia. Uzbek pretensions to primacy are grounded in its being the largest indigenous nation in the region and its experience as the former Soviet-approved imperial centre of the region. The conflicting Uzbek–Kazakh claims have resulted in tense bilateral relations which have been a fundamental obstacle to regional cooperation.

The Uzbek–Kazakh competition for regional leadership provides little reassurance for the smaller Central Asian states. All of them share a common fear that talk of unity or integration in Tashkent or Almaty might be a precedent for the imposition of an Uzbek or Kazakh imperium. Distrust and suspicion of Uzbekistan is particularly strongly felt. Turkmenistan is the most open in implicitly acknowledging these fears and Niyazov has been the most lukewarm about Central Asian integration.[48] Kyrgyzstan has analogous fears of Uzbek intentions, especially with the secessionist-minded Uzbek minority in the region around Osh. Tajikistan would have similar concerns were it not for the fact that the ruling elite which emerged from the civil war is beholden to Tashkent for its grip on power.

The degree of distrust between the Central Asian states reflects the ultimate success of Stalin's drawing of the region's borders, since his avowed intention was to undermine any pan-Turkic or pan-Islamic

political entity. As in the Arab world, the colonial-imposed borders and states are, in practice, deeply rooted. Inter-state competition remains a dominant force, especially in the economic field where the absence of regional economic complementarity has resulted in a zero-sum game for foreign investment and markets. The Soviet system of vertical links to the centre at the expense of inter-regional horizontal ties has also meant that there is greater common ground with Russia than between the constituent states of the region. Indeed, there is a strong element of competition between them to forge a 'special relationship' with Russia to advance their specific geo-strategic ambitions. Kazakhstan seeks from Moscow a confirmation of its role as the strategic bridgehead between East and West; Uzbekistan seeks support for its position as the regional hegemon; Turkmenistan is looking for a security guarantee against external aggression; Kyrgyzstan is reaching out for a special 'democratic' relationship; and the Tajik government seeks Russian defence for its continued hold on power.

Russia, therefore, remains a key actor in the politics of Central Asia. The open competition for its special attention highlights the actual disunity and mutual distrust of the separate Central Asian states. It also reflects the extent to which the Central Asian leaders continue to depend ultimately on Russia for the security of their respective states and for the preservation of wider regional stability.

III. THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

After years of obscurity as far-flung provinces of the Soviet empire, the outside world has found it difficult to incorporate the newly independent Central Asian states into an appropriate conceptual framework. Initially, the most compelling theory was that the Soviet withdrawal had instigated a new 'Great Game' which pitted fundamentalist Iran against secular Turkey. It was not long, however, before this analogy appeared less than convincing as Turkey and Iran failed to make inroads into the region and Russian influence appeared to be strongly entrenched. As a result, it became almost as fashionable to assume that Russia had effectively reintegrated Central Asia into a new imperial order.

These two contrasting analogies capture some important insights, but are generally misleading. Even in the period of seeming Russian impotence in the immediate aftermath of the August 1991 coup it was a mistake to discount Russia as a powerful regional actor. Since then, it has succeeded in defending its position as the dominant external power in Central Asia and has effectively limited the potential for other neighbouring countries, such as Turkey, Iran or China, to enhance their influence to the degree that they had initially hoped. As a result, the projected 'Great Game' has not lived up to its romantic nineteenth-century ideal. But Russian influence has not been so pervasive and restrictive as to exclude these other neighbouring countries from Central Asia. Albeit on a less dramatic scale, significant cultural, economic and political relations have developed between these countries and the Central Asian states and the prospects are for increased involvement and engagement. In the long term it is to be expected that Central Asia will gradually lose its Russian colouring and become more fully integrated in the wider region.

At a more fundamental level, there was also the mistaken assumption that Central Asia was necessarily a strategic vacuum which had to be filled by some external foreign imperial power. In reality, the Central Asian states have been determined to be master of their own fates. They have strongly defended their rights to define the nature, timing and extent of their relations with the outside world. Their net has been cast widely and they have exhibited few prejudices, pragmatically judging any new relations for their prospective advantages. As a result, Western, Middle Eastern and South-east Asian countries have all been equally welcomed and offered the opportunity to develop diplomatic, economic and political links. The Central Asian states are,

in effect, seeking to keep their international options as open as possible to protect their independence and to promote themselves as regional actors in their own right. It is this underlying ambition which should be kept in mind when analysing the regional and international relations of the newly independent Central Asian states, even in the complex redefinition of the post-imperial relationship with Russia.

Russia and the CIS

The need to construct a qualitatively new relationship with Russia has been the most complex and sensitive post-Soviet challenge for the Central Asian states. The distinctive legacy of Russian imperial practice and its penetration into Central Asia has only magnified the sensitivity of this challenge. Unlike the French or British empires, the Russian and Soviet empire was always a contiguous entity. Combined with the highly centralised nature of the Soviet system, the economic, political and military links between the different parts of the empire were far more embedded than French or British links with their predominantly transatlantic empires. The presence of ten million ethnic Russians in Central Asia and large Turko-Muslim nations in the Russian Federation, such as the Tatars and Bashkirs, highlights the demographic inter-connectedness of the Russian–Soviet empire. This necessarily makes the imperial separation of Russia from Central Asia a more difficult and potentially more destabilising process than other analogous imperial disengagements, such as the British withdrawal from India. The Russian government is naturally sensitive to any perceived or actual threats to Russian brethren remaining in Central Asia. For their part, the Central Asian governments can allude to major domestic unrest within Russia if Central Asian interests are not respected by the authorities in Moscow.

The absence of a nation-building anti-colonial struggle in Central Asia adds another distinctive feature to the post-imperial Russian–Central Asian relationship. Unlike other regions of the former Soviet Union, such as the Caucasus, Ukraine or the Baltic states, the Central Asian states gained their independence without a popular anti-Russian uprising. The leaders of the newly independent states were far from nationalist firebrands: they had been faithful members of the Soviet Communist Party and advocates of close links with the political hierarchy in Moscow. After long careers as obedient servants of the Soviet apparatus, their instinctive response to the disintegration of the Soviet Union was to seek a new relationship with Russia which would protect rather than destroy the old links. In part, this reflected a realistic appreciation, absent from many of the more nationalistic post-Soviet governments, of the many critical dependencies of the Soviet system, particularly in the security and economic fields. But, in part, it highlighted a deep-seated fear of the consequences of losing Moscow's guiding hand – the natural reflex reaction after a century of treating Russia as the 'elder brother' whose will defined the political, economic and social framework of Central Asia. This sense of the necessary imperial subordination of Central Asia has also left its mark on the Russian consciousness. The popularity of the political programme of Vladimir Zhirinovsky in the December 1993 Russian elections revealed the continuing vitality of the Russian imperial mentality.

It is important, however, to be careful in suggesting a Central Asian inferiority complex towards Russia or Russia's determination to perpetuate its imperial control over Central Asia. There are also powerful pressures from both sides to consolidate the process of imperial separation. For all their past fealty to the Soviet imperial system, the leaders of the Central Asian states are far from willing to cede the newly acquired sovereignty of their states to the dictates of Moscow. For essentially opportunistic reasons, the Central Asian leaders have become committed independent nationalists, seeking to promote the full political and economic independence of their countries. Any neo-imperialist statements emanating from the nationalist Russian opposition, or even at times from the Russian government, are unambiguously condemned in the Central Asian press. Unlike the Francophone countries of West Africa, the Central Asian states know that there are other possible alliances, such as with China or with countries from the Middle East, to offset any renewed Russian expansion. If Russia were to revert to its traditional imperial disposition, it is probable that the Central Asian states would adopt a far more hostile attitude.

The fact that Central Asian–Russian relations have remained reasonably cordial since independence reflects the general confidence of the Central Asian ruling elites in the post-imperial inclinations of the Yeltsin administration. Indeed, these elites have been more concerned that Russia might be tempted to withdraw too precipitately from the region and seek to cut all ties with its former southern Muslim empire. The first warning signal of this came with the initial CIS agreement of December 1991, when the Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian leaders ignored their Central Asian colleagues to form a purely Slavic union. Since then, the greater priority the post-Soviet Russian government has given to its European–Slavic as against its Central Asian–Muslim neighbours has been a significant factor in the policy orientation of the Yeltsin administration. This approach has enjoyed considerable popular support, capitalising on the Russian nationalist grievance that the

Central Asian empire had been a political, economic and military drain on Russian resources and wealth. There was also a cultural, even chauvinist, dimension in the drive for disengagement from Central Asia which implicitly came to symbolise the resolve of post-Soviet Russia to protect its fledgling European democratic roots from the authoritarian and repressive traditions of the Muslim East.

This Eurocentric orientation dominated Russian policy towards Central Asia in the first few months of 1992 and ensured a relatively rapid Russian withdrawal from the region. However, the deliberate distancing from Central Asia was to be increasingly challenged. Such challenges were not restricted to the Central Asian ruling elites, who repeatedly warned of the dangers of the region's political and economic collapse and the predatory designs of Middle Eastern Muslim fundamentalist forces. There also emerged a powerful constituency within the Russian government which strongly contested the policy approach taken by the Yeltsin administration and by the Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev. These included senior figures in the military who feared the loss of their strategic installations in Central Asia and the eruption of inter-ethnic conflicts similar to those which had emerged in the Caucasus; powerful economic lobbies, which sought to guarantee the supply of the raw materials which Central Asia had provided; and a number of senior politicians who believed that Russia had vital strategic interests on its southern borders which had to be more forcibly protected.[1] All believed that Russia had to be more actively engaged in Central Asia to ensure stability in the region, protect it from dangerous external influences such as Islamic fundamentalism, and encourage the Central Asian states to maintain a pro-Russian foreign and domestic policy.[2]

The Tajik civil war in the latter part of 1992 strengthened Kozyrev's critics. As a result, there emerged a more hard-headed assessment amongst the Russian ruling elite that the Tajik conflict had to be contained and the Tajik–Afghan border defended, and more generally that Russia had to be more actively committed to the security of Central Asia, primarily in the military, but also in the political and economic fields. The CIS institutional framework provided the principal overarching framework for implementing this increased Russian engagement.[3] The structural advantage of the CIS, both for Russia and the Central Asian states, was that it legitimised Russian involvement in Central Asia, but as a partner rather than an imperial hegemon and within an arrangement where there was at least formal equality of status. The CIS collective security agreement signed at the Tashkent Summit in May 1992 by Russia, Armenia and all the Central Asian

states except Turkmenistan, provided the main security dimension of this CIS framework. The significance of the agreement did not primarily lie in its internal provisions; more importantly it provided an essential precondition and backdrop for the more detailed and substantive bilateral military agreements which Russia subsequently signed with all the Central Asian states, including Turkmenistan.

The Tashkent collective security agreement and the associated bilateral agreements satisfied some of the central demands of the Russian military and the security concerns of the Central Asian states. For the Russian military, the arrangement preserved the integrated Soviet (redefined as CIS) defence space and ensured Russian *de facto*, if not *de jure*, control over the principal strategic installations in the region. For the Central Asian leaderships, the arrangement gave a formal Russian commitment to provide security guarantees against external threats and implicit reassurances against internal threats of the type which had emerged in Tajikistan. On a more practical level, the Russian involvement provided support for the development of their own national armies which, due to Soviet personnel practice, continued to be dominated by ethnic Russian officers and technical specialists.

On a strictly practical level, Russian military patronage was essential if the new Central Asian armies were to maintain their military capability and have any chance of developing into genuinely independent forces. But such patronage has had less welcome political costs, even for the most pro-Russian Central Asian leaders, and has led to significant bilateral tensions. The highly intrusive Russian involvement in Central Asian security arrangements, accentuated by the presence of ethnic Russians in the key military positions, represents a visible derogation of Central Asian sovereign control. For understandable reasons, Central Asian leaders can be far from assured of the loyalty of the Russian military elite, particularly if any future threat were to emanate from Russia itself. Contributing to the difficulties have been conflicts between the officer corps and conscripts, who are predominantly drawn from the indigenous population and who have been frequently indignant at their subordination to foreign Russian-speaking superiors.[4]

The Russian authorities have also used their strong bargaining position to make politically difficult demands on the Central Asian governments, most notably the provision of dual citizenship rights for Russian citizens residing in the region. Furthermore, they have insisted that the Central Asian states pay fully for their own national armed forces and make substantial financial and material contributions to joint CIS operations. For their part, the Russian military has jealously

protected its independence of action, vigorously opposing any institutional strengthening of the CIS joint command, such as along the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) lines promoted by most of the Central Asian governments. The dismantlement of the CIS joint command in June 1993 and the establishment of a jointly financed, unified Russian–Kazakh–Uzbek–Kyrgyz–Tajik peacekeeping force under Russian operational control to police the Tajik–Afghan border in late 1993 demonstrates that the Tashkent agreement is being implemented on Russian terms.

The inherent tensions in the Russian–Central Asian security arrangements are grounded on the conflicting centrifugal and centripetal pressures at the heart of their post-Soviet relationship. On the Central Asian side, this involves the conflict between the need to assert national sovereignty and the practical requirements of protecting the security of the state. On the Russian side, the conflict is between the desire to preserve its strategic interests in Central Asia and the need to minimise the financial and political costs of such involvement. Like the US experience in Vietnam, the ghost of Afghanistan remains ever-present in the minds of the Russian ruling elite and limits how far the Russians are willing to guarantee the security of Central Asia.[5]

These tensions are also replicated in the more strictly economic and political relations between Russia and Central Asia. Given the parlous state of the Russian economy, there are strong domestic pressures against providing subsidies to the Central Asian economy. The claim by Finance Minister Boris Fedorov that Russia was providing $17 billion (21.4% of gross domestic product) on aid to the developing world reflects a popular perception that Russia is still sacrificing its economic good for the sake of its post-imperial responsibilities.[6] For their part, the Central Asian states deeply resented the harsh conditions demanded by Russia for remaining in the rouble zone and the consequent need to introduce their own national currencies, which they were forced to bring in at the end of 1993. At the same time, Russian warnings against economic integration with southern neighbours and the recrudescence of Russian neo-imperialism associated with Zhirinovsky have considerably undermined Central Asian confidence in Russia's good intentions. In the aftermath of the December 1993 elections, there are considerable fears in Central Asia that the relationship with Russia might be heading into much stormier waters.

The emergence of Zhirinovsky as a popularly mandated political figure in Russia was certainly a salutary reminder of the potential fragility of Russia's post-imperial course. But Zhirinovsky's appeal for a new Russian imperium has more of a rhetorical than a practical

application. The reality is that Russia has been engaged in the two years since independence in a managed process of imperial withdrawal from Central Asia whose dynamics would be difficult to arrest. Objectively, the tensions in Russian–Central Asian relations have been relatively minor, reflecting an essential congruity of interests between the Russian and Central Asian ruling elites. Unlike their counterparts in the Caucasus or Ukraine, the Central Asian leaders have not been afraid to assert that their countries are connected to Russia by 'billions of threads which are impossible to break'.[7] They have welcomed the pragmatic advantages of continued close relations with Russia, relying on Russian aid for the creation of indigenous armed forces, for the provision of security guarantees and for help in promoting economic and political stability as new markets and new political relationships are developed.

Similarly, the Russian government has realised that support for the pro-Russian elites in the Central Asian states, and acceptance of their assertion of political and economic independence, is the most cost-effective way of ensuring stability in the region and protecting vital Russian strategic interests. Maintaining healthy bilateral relations with the two key states of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the critical linchpins for the success of this strategy. Good relations with the Kazakh government, which includes a commitment to the integrity of Kazakhstan, is essential for promoting inter-ethnic harmony and avoiding the damaging consequences of an Algerian-style confrontation between Russians and Kazakhs. Uzbekistan is almost as strategically important since the Russian–Uzbek alliance is critical for preventing nationalist or religious extremism and the intervention of potentially hostile external powers, such as Iran, Afghanistan or Turkey. Russia's respect for the sovereign rights of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and to a lesser extent the three smaller countries of Central Asia, is an essential pre-condition for their cooperation, which would be quickly forfeited if replaced by Russian neo-imperialist self-assertion.

The continuation of this mutually advantageous relationship, of the managed process of imperial withdrawal, depends on the nationalist self-restraint of both the Russian and Central Asian governments. Although such internal political changes cannot be discounted, it is likely that the dynamics of Russian–Central Asian relations will remain broadly on the same trajectory. For all its inherent tensions and contradictions, it does provide a framework in which Russian and Central Asian strategic interests can be protected and a stable regional order can be defended. At the same time, it provides the Central Asian

states with the opportunity to reassert their links with their other neighbours and to liberate themselves from the Russian imperial shadow.

The new regional actors

TURKEY

The greatest obstacle to Russian expansion into the Muslim world in the nineteenth century was the Ottoman empire. With the Russian imperial withdrawal in the late twentieth century, many believed that Turkey was the most likely state to reap the political benefits. In Central Asia, Turkey appeared to have an unassailable advantage over its other potential regional competitors. There were the common ethno-cultural roots between Turkey and the Turkic nations of Central Asia who represent the overwhelming majority of the indigenous population of the region. The in-gathering of the Turkic nation struck an emotional cord in both Anatolia and the countries of Central Asia.[8] The expansion of Turkey's influence in Central Asia was also given an official stamp of approval by the West, Russia and the Arab states. Turkey's democratic secular form of government was judged to be the appropriate developmental model for the Central Asian states and the most effective political weapon against Iranian-sponsored Islamic fundamentalism. In the security vacuum after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey was promoted as the standard-bearer of democracy, religious moderation and Western values.

The initial response of the Central Asian states to the Turkish diplomatic drive appeared to fulfil these dreams of Turkey's strategic expansion. Senior Turkish officials who toured the region in March and April 1992 were received enthusiastically. There was a highly emotional response to the prospects of a joyful reunion of the Turkic nation after centuries of separation. In Uzbekistan, President Karimov was even reported to have stated that 'the day will come when we all meet in the same parliament'.[9] Turkey was also generous in its offers of aid and support. $1.5bn-worth of credits was distributed, with $650m in soft loans for food and $600m in commercial and credit guarantees. 10,000 scholarships were provided for students in Central Asia to study in Turkish universities.

Turkey presented itself as the ideal conduit for the Central Asian states to initiate their relations with the outside world, particularly with the West. Although it had no territory contiguous with Central Asia, Turkey highlighted its regional credentials through its membership of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), a long-dormant institution of the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) alliance revived in early 1992 to create a regional economic configuration to incorporate the Central Asian states, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Turkey also continually sought to institutionalise the pan-Turkic drive for economic and political integration which was to reach its apotheosis in Ankara in November 1992 at the summit of Turkic-speaking nations.

Despite all these efforts, Turkey's star in the region was destined to wane after the initial post-independence euphoria had died down. The Ankara summit was a particular disappointment as President Turgut Özal's entreaties for a common market were politely rejected by the leaders of the Central Asian states. Karimov poured cold water on these ambitions not only by rejecting any prospective recreation of a unified Turkestan, but also by showing considerable reluctance towards any further integration of the Turkic nations.[10] Karimov's change of heart from his earlier enthusiastic advocacy of the Turkish model to only barely veiled disillusion with it in late 1992, provided the most striking indication of the relative failure of Turkey's diplomatic drive.[11]

The reasons for this failure were a mixture of excessive expectations and mutual misunderstandings. It was widely forgotten that the Ottoman empire had only ever been a Levantine and European and never a Central Asian empire. In fact, the two halves of the Turkic nation had been separated since the expansion of the Russian empire into the Volga region in the sixteenth century. Moreover, the historical legacy of Central Asia had been just as much influenced by Persian as by Turkic culture. The long separation of the Turkic nation and the consequent divergent development had resulted in fewer common cultural, social or even linguistic links than either parties expected.

These historical misconceptions undermined some of the initial approaches made by Turkish politicians and diplomats. They tended to treat the Central Asian states as lost wayward brothers of the Turkic nation whose pristine centre was in Anatolia. In a region which had just been the victim of a century of Russian 'big brother' rule, there was considerable sensitivity at any sign of cultural or national superiority.[12] Pakistan directly capitalised on this by stressing that, in contrast to Turkey, it was an offspring rather than a parent culture of Central Asia. The pan-Turkic dimensions of Turkey's policy also created concerns, particularly for the conservative ex-communist leaders of Central Asia. From their perspective, Turkey's support for the Azeri Popular Front and its overthrow of the former communist apparatus in Baku in May 1992 was an ominous sign. Turkish agitation amongst the Turkic communities inside the Russian Federation, particularly in the North Caucasus and the Volga, was an additional

source of concern. The Central Asian leaderships had no desire to be associated with policies which might provoke a Russian backlash against the Muslim Turkic world.

The Central Asian states also gradually realised that Turkey could not deliver the economic and diplomatic goods that they had at first expected. Visitors from the region to Turkey who had been led to expect something comparable to a Western European country were initially shocked by the relative weakness of the Turkish economy. As it became apparent that Turkey did not have the necessary capital for large-scale investment in Central Asia, economic integration lost much of its attraction. Similarly, as Central Asian diplomacy became more sure of itself and dealt directly with the outside world, the perceived need for Turkish mediation declined.

A greater realism also emerged in Turkey as politicians and businessmen took a more hard-headed view of Turkey's interests, which had been partially obscured by the pan-Turkic euphoria engendered after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It became clearer that Turkey was over-stretching itself, attempting to operate on too many fronts and that it had to concentrate its energies. On the internal domestic scene, there was still the need to overcome the divisions and conflicts within Turkey, ranging from Kurdish separatism, the growth of Islamist groups and the poor state of the economy. On the external front, Europe, the Middle East, the countries connected to the Black Sea Cooperation Council, and the Caucasus had more immediate claims on Turkish national interests and foreign-policy priorities than distant Central Asia. Businessmen reminded the government that 90% of Turkey's trade with the former Soviet countries was with Russia and that it was senseless to jeopardise these vital economic relations through the reckless promotion of the pan-Turkic cause.

The unravelling of Turkey's initial ambitions and the decline in expectations has led to a lower level of Turkish involvement in Central Asia. But, even if less developed than had initially been hoped, the many political, economic and even military–security links between Turkey and the Central Asian states represent a considerable Turkish engagement in the region. The large number of Central Asian students being educated in Turkish universities, technical colleges and military academies will provide an important source of Turkish influence in the future. The Central Asian political and business elites also place a considerable degree of trust in their Turkish counterparts and, although this will not be translated into privileged access, it should provide the basis for greater bilateral cooperation. Given the close linguistic and cultural links that exist, Turkey will probably maintain a position of

primus inter pares. But, to sustain this favoured status, it will have to rein in its pan-Turkic ambitions, which can appear threatening to the Central Asian ruling elites, and accept that, in the political and economic development of the region, it will not have exclusive rights. Other countries, even close rivals like Iran, will also be significant actors on the Central Asian scene.

IRAN

The development of the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with Central Asia presents an almost reverse picture to that of Turkey. At first, Iran was presented by the West, Russia and the Arab world as the greatest threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Central Asian states.[13] The post-communist and secular nationalist leaders of Central Asia broadly endorsed this view, with the notable exception of President Niyazov of Turkmenistan. This sense of threat was further strengthened by the perceived Iranian moral and material support given to the Islamist groups in Tajikistan, particularly during the escalation of the crisis in 1992. An icy Cold War atmosphere pervaded Central Asian–Iranian relations and bilateral contacts were reduced to a minimum.

From this weak and distrusted position, Iran has subsequently had some success in projecting a more positive image. This has partly been due to the grudging acceptance by the Central Asian states that Iranian policy has been more moderate and less destabilising than was originally thought. Although Iran did criticise the massacre of Muslims in Tajikistan, it never openly supported the opposition and did not intervene in the civil war in any substantial manner.[14] It acquiesced in the return of the former Tajik ruling elite and established cordial bilateral relations, offering humanitarian aid for the suffering Tajik population. Iran's balanced and impartial mediation in the Caucasus, in contrast to Turkey's unofficial but open support for Azerbaijan, similarly calmed nerves in Central Asia. By the end of 1992, Iran's consistent claims that it had no intention of intervening in the internal affairs of other countries had a more receptive audience in Central Asia. In November 1992, Karimov of Uzbekistan, Iran's bitterest critic, agreed to open diplomatic relations and to seek a cautious *rapprochement*.

Another factor in Iran's favour was that, unlike Turkey, Iran has a large contiguous border with Central Asia and is an unavoidable geostrategic presence in the region. Niyazov was the first to realise this and has assiduously developed bilateral economic relations and advanced projects for connecting the Central Asian rail network to Iran and developing a gas pipeline through Iranian territory. The other

Central Asian states have gradually moved closer to Niyazov's more pragmatic stance. Kazakhstan, for instance, has been promoting economic cooperation in the Caspian Sea and has viewed Iran as a potential route through which oil from that region might be transported.[15] Greater openness to Iranian influence has also been noticeable in other non-political areas. Iran has been quick to capitalise on the growing desire in Central Asia to rediscover the Persian cultural heritage, which in many ways is richer and more resplendent than the Turkish heritage.

These represent only cautious openings and Iran's opportunities for increasing its influence are not unlimited. Its internal economic problems and its international isolation limit its capabilities to act as a catalyst for Central Asia's economic development.[16] So long as a revolutionary Shi'a regime is in power in Tehran distrust of Iranian intentions will persist within the secular nationalist leaderships and generally amongst the Sunni population of Central Asia. The most that can be expected is that increasingly warmer relations based on the principle of pragmatic advantage will emerge and the ideological division will not be treated as an obstacle to mutually beneficial economic, cultural and political exchanges.

These limited relations, however welcome they might be, will not satisfy the wider ambitions of the Rafsanjani government which is seeking to normalise Iran's regional and international relations. The inherent difficulty facing Rafsanjani is that, for all his efforts at projecting a non-ideological foreign policy, there is no escape from the legacy of the Iranian revolution. In this regard, there are many parallels with the Cold War debate of whether to pursue relations of détente or confrontation with the Soviet Union. The arguments are the same: some, like Russia and the Central Asian states, suggest that Iran's behaviour can be moderated through linkage; others, like most Western states, judge the Iranian regime to be intrinsically unreformable and to be opposed until destroyed. In both instances, the assumption that is left unchallenged is that the Iranian regime and its revolutionary ideology represent incontrovertible threats. There are also certain Soviet analogies in the Iranian regime's sense of paranoia at the outside world's inability to treat it as a normal power. Many in Tehran view the break-up of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the ethnic-based states of Central Asia as a deliberate Western-inspired plot to encourage secessionism amongst its own national minorities, such as the Azeris or Turkmen. Reports that the Afghan Uzbek leader, Rashid Dostum, is considering establishing an Uzbek state in Northern Afghanistan to be named after the ancient Persian region of Khurasan confirms the deepest suspicions of a US–Russian–Uzbek–Turkish grand conspiracy.[17]

These exaggerated fears of external plots highlight the essentially defensive orientation of Iranian strategy towards Central Asia. With a faltering economy, the need for reconstruction after the Iran–Iraq War and weak and depleted armed forces, Iran's energies are primarily focused on internal consolidation and rejuvenation. Iran's radical Islamic message will still have political power and appeal in Central Asia. But the Iranian government would be as alarmed as other governments by a wave of revolutionary Islam sweeping across its northern borders, bringing a new regional instability to add to the turmoil in Iraq to its west and Afghanistan to its east. In this regard, it is salutary to note that groups from Saudi Arabia rather than Iran have been more active in Central Asia in promoting Islam and in providing funds to radical Islamist groups.[18]

CHINA

The fear that the independence of the Central Asian states might be just as much a threat as an opportunity is also felt in China. It has led to concerns over the potential destabilising effect of independence on China's own Central Asian imperial appendage in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. China's Muslim Turkic minorities, who are mainly to be found in Xinjiang, include around 7m Uighurs, 1m Kazakhs and 150,000 Kyrgyz. Ethnic unrest in Xinjiang has occurred periodically, such as in April 1990 and early 1992, and the Chinese authorities resorted to force to repress these demonstrations.[19] The prospect of further instability spreading from the newly emergent states of Central Asia into Xinjiang or even Inner Mongolia has been an unwelcome development. The activity of a 'Free Uighurstan Party' in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan has increased these fears.[20]

The sense of threat, however, is even more strongly felt in the Central Asian states. The Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks have deeply embedded fears about Chinese imperial encroachments, which were magnified by Chinese claims to large parts of their territory during the 1970s and 1980s. Now that Russia is no longer perceived as the major external threat, China is the natural replacement. Given its size and nuclear status, its unreconstructed imperial pretensions and its traditional historical claims on the region, China represents a threat far exceeding that of Iran. Particularly amongst the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, the fear of China borders on the paranoic. It was one of the main factors which led Nazarbayev to consider retaining his nuclear arsenal.[21] Amongst the Kyrgyz, every disaster is routinely blamed on the

Chinese. The series of earthquakes in April 1992 in southern Kyrgyzstan were popularly believed to have been deliberately caused by a nuclear test in Lop Nor.[22]

China's strategy to alleviate its own security concerns as well as to reassure the Central Asian states has been to promote cross-border trade. The capacity of the rail-link between Urumchi and Alma-Ata has been expanded and trade has flourished. Chinese consumer products have enjoyed a rapidly expanding market in Central Asia due to their relative cheapness and strong local demand. In the first nine months of 1992, it was reported that Chinese goods represented 56% of Kazakhstan's imports and overall trade reached $1.2bn.[23] In larger industrial projects, Chinese technology has often been seen to be more appropriate and cheaper than Western equivalents. For the authoritarian leaders in Central Asia, who are only gradually moving towards a market economy, the Chinese model has many attractive features, and this has strengthened Chinese–Central Asian relations. The progress in the joint Russian–Central Asian and Chinese negotiations on the demarcation of borders has additionally alleviated concerns over Chinese irredentism.

Although China has been using trade as a practical sign of its good intentions, it can also undermine these efforts. The entrepreneurial success of Chinese traders, many of whom act within mafia organisations, has already engendered local Central Asian resentment and hostility. In addition, the porousness of the Chinese–Central Asian borders has meant that thousands of Chinese are settling in Central Asia; the Chinese population of Kazakhstan was reported to exceed 300,000.[24] To the more suspicious Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, this new Chinese community appears as a potential fifth column for Chinese expansion. China must also be worried that so many of its citizens are deciding to renounce their Chinese citizenship and reside in the less oppressive political environment of Central Asia.

There have been reports that the Chinese authorities remain confident in their ability to 'maintain a Great Wall to safeguard socialism' and to suppress any domestic unrest in the imperial periphery.[25] So long as Xinjiang remains quiescent, China will continue to cement relations with Central Asia through economic and trade links. Even if this leads to local hostility in Central Asia, it is unlikely that these countries would seek to alienate their large neighbour through excessive protectionist measures. A friendly relationship with China also offers the governments of Central Asia an additional weapon to deter Russian attempts to reimpose its imperial rule. But if Xinjiang were to become unsettled, China might want to seal off its border with Central

Asia. A large-scale Chinese campaign in Xinjiang would undoubtedly increase Central Asian fears of China's intentions and result in increased demands for Russian strategic protection.

Any assessment of China's future role in Central Asia must necessarily include a number of unpredictable elements. On the one hand, there is the issue of what happens inside China itself and whether the process of economic devolution might lead to a greater political liberalisation. On the other, the Chinese relationship with Central Asia cannot be divorced from the future evolution of Russian–Chinese relations and Russian relations with Central Asia. If Russo-Chinese relations were to deteriorate, Central Asia might be the unfortunate victim of the subsequent power struggle. Whatever happens, China cannot be ignored by the newly independent countries of Central Asia. It is both one of the region's greatest security threats and, with its fast-growing and dynamic economy, perhaps the region's greatest hope for the future.

AFGHANISTAN

Because Afghanistan also borders Central Asia, its disintegration over the ten years of civil war and the worrying precedents this has set for the fragile internal constitutions of the Central Asian states has been a source of acute anxiety in the region. The victory of the mujaheddin in April 1992, allied with the contemporaneous internal Tajik conflict, exacerbated these fears. The political ascendance of Afghan groups who openly espoused the export of *jihad* and the simultaneous prominence of Islamist groups in Tajikistan were not viewed as entirely coincidental. The vigorous arms trade across the Afghan–Tajik border, reports of fundamentalist training camps in northern Afghanistan and rumours of Afghan mujaheddin participating in the Tajik fighting, only confirmed the worst fears of the spread of instability from Afghanistan into Central Asia.

Support for the Tajik opposition groups has indisputably been flowing from Afghanistan. Arms were traded in large quantities and Afghanistan has acted as a base for the opposition forces to regroup and open new offenses. The 80,000 Tajik refugees who fled into Afghanistan have been a source of recruits for Islamist militias who have been given sanctuary by local Afghan leaders.[26] The opening of an office for the Saudi-based World Muslim League in Kunduz indicates that external financial support is being given to Islamist groups to continue the guerrilla war in Tajikistan. There are suggestions that some 3–5,000 members of the IRP are undergoing military training by Afghan mujaheddin, supported by Arab and Pakistani Islamists.[27] The numer-

ous attacks by the Tajik opposition on the Tajik–Afghan border regions during the spring and summer of 1993 confirmed that the opposition forces have successfully regrouped in Afghanistan and continue to present a threat to the regime in Dushanbe.

However, the extent of Afghan support for the Tajik opposition forces should not be exaggerated. The number of arms provided from Afghan sources has been estimated to be around 10% of the total and observers have noted that they were generally old and unsophisticated. Similarly, the numbers of Afghan mujaheddin actually fighting in Tajikistan never numbered more than a few hundred. Even the material support given by Afghan guerrilla leaders to Tajik armed groups has had a greater financial than strategic or moral incentive, since willingness to give such support has provided these Afghan guerrillas with a justification for making additional financial demands on Islamic agencies, such as the World Muslim League. As the wider Muslim world loses interest in Afghanistan, the romantic allure of a *jihad* in Tajikistan has continuing financial pulling power. For the Afghan Islamist groups, though, the overriding strategic prize remains the keys to Kabul and control of the Afghan state and not the spread of Islamic revolution into Central Asia.

The degree of influence emanating from Afghanistan into Central Asia is more than matched by the influence flowing in the other direction. Uzbekistan, and to a lesser degree Turkmenistan, have developed a good working relationship with Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek warlord controlling all north-west Afghanistan west of Mazar-e-Sharif. Dostum has been the main conduit through which Uzbekistan, Russia and the other Central Asian states have sought to secure their interests in Afghanistan.[28] More controversially, Karimov has described the Uzbek population as his brothers and noted that he cannot be indifferent to their fate.[29] Given that much of northern Afghanistan was historically part of Bukharan territory, the rumoured statements by Dostum that he wants to create an Uzbek state in the north can only resurrect fears of Uzbek expansionism amongst other Afghan groups. Although there is no strong evidence that either Dostum or Karimov are encouraging the break-up of the Afghan state, they have shown a mutual interest in securing a political settlement which would strengthen the position of the Afghan Uzbeks and undermine the power of the Islamists in the Afghan government.

If the 'Great Game' is being played anywhere, it is not in former Soviet Central Asia, but in Afghanistan. The weakness of the Afghan state and the presence of a multiplicity of guerrilla groups with varying ethnic and religious claims provides fertile ground for external powers

to play the imperial game for influence. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have been competing for their specific Islamic vision to be realised in the Afghan mountains. They now have to confront a new participant and a new ideological dimension – independent Uzbekistan and its secular ethnic-based nationalism.

The West and the rest of the world

For countries not geographically close to the region, the emergence of the newly independent states of Central Asia has generated considerable interest, but has not been treated as a major strategic priority. Nuclear proliferation and the threat of Iranian expansion were the principal exceptions. In the first two years of Central Asian independence, pressure was effectively brought to bear on Kazakhstan to honour its agreement to be a non-nuclear state and the Central Asian states managed, with the partial exception of Tajikistan, to resist the allure of Iranian-style radical Islam. Once these concerns were resolved relatively satisfactorily, the West and the wider world have tended to focus their energies on other more pressing international issues and have found it hard to focus much attention on the problems and difficulties facing the Central Asian states.

This absence of any major external strategic interest in the region contrasts with the enthusiasm and lack of prejudice that these states have shown in developing relations with the outside world. Countries which have shown the barest flicker of interest in the economic prospects of Central Asia have been courted, whatever their political or ideological stance. Ignoring the reservations of the Muslim and Arab world, Israeli diplomats and businessmen have been welcomed in the Central Asian countries.[30] At the same time, money from Saudi Arabia has been gratefully accepted in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states for building mosques and reviving Muslim religious practice.[31] The interest shown in Central Asia by East Asian countries, such as Korea, Singapore or Japan, has been even more openly welcomed, as they have engineered the type of economic growth that the Central Asian states would dearly like to emulate.

The West has similarly given most of its attention to the economic situation in Central Asia and has generally received a favourable response. The Central Asian states have been energetic in trying to tempt Western investment to develop the natural resources and industries in the region. Overcoming their initial suspicions, the leaders of these states have supported the involvement of the World Bank, the IMF and other development agencies. Kyrgyzstan has led the way in economic reform, but Kazakhstan has not been far behind and IMF and

World Bank officials remain hopeful that Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan will eventually step onto the same path.

The West can most realistically hope to influence the politics and attitudes of the Central Asian region through support for structural economic and institutional reform. However, the window of opportunity will not last forever. Donor countries will not indefinitely support disproportionate generosity to the countries of the former Soviet Union when the claims from Africa and the rest of the Third World are just as urgent. Within the region itself, Central Asian faith in Western economic aid and help has only a limited time-frame. If the West is popularly perceived to have failed to live up to its promises on aid and economic support, the attraction of the anti-Western rhetoric of some of Central Asia's neighbours will increase. It must be kept in mind that it is in these early formative years of independence that the future foreign-policy orientation of the Central Asian states will be defined. Certainly, the West cannot be expected to prop up governments which refuse to engage in genuine reforms but, where they do, it is vital that the West lives up to its promises of support.

Visible support for economic reform is even more vital since the Western record in its policies towards Central Asian security cannot be judged a glittering success. The extension of the CSCE and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) to the Central Asian states was an ill-conceived move which did little to alleviate the security concerns of Central Asia or its immediate neighbours. From the perspective of Moscow, the inclusion of the Central Asian states in these European and Western institutions undercuts Russia's craving to be part of a European and Western security alliance, however tangentially. For the Central Asian states, the failure of the CSCE and NACC to become even minimally involved in the Tajik civil war undermined the practical credentials of these organisations. The credibility of the West naturally suffers when its high-sounding institutions are shown to lack any teeth. For some of the more authoritarian governments, disillusion has turned to hostility when the only function that the CSCE appears to be fulfilling is to warn these governments of their human-rights violations.

The failure of the UN to contemplate any substantial involvement in the Tajik civil war, despite requests from a number of Central Asian states, has similarly limited the influence of the West and the international community in the region. Even the mildest criticisms of Russian peacekeeping operations appear hypocritical in Moscow when the West is in effect leaving Russia with the sole responsibility for resolving conflicts on the periphery of the former Soviet Union. Although the UN Secretariat has rightly been concerned about its excessive commitments elsewhere, its *de facto* policy during 1992 of leaving the former Soviet Union out of bounds for peacekeeping operations did send the wrong signals. Even though the political obstacles to large troop contributions will undoubtedly continue to be insurmountable, the sending of smaller missions, such as UN military observers, can have significant symbolic value. They can reassure Russia that the international community is actively committed to ensuring regional stability, whilst providing some lever for encouraging Russia to act within the framework of international norms of behaviour. A more visible UN presence can also confirm the national sovereignty of the other states of the former Soviet Union and assure them that the international community is not in favour of a reimposition of Russian imperial control.

The West has the delicate task of taking seriously Russia's security interests in Central Asia, whilst at the same time encouraging a peaceful process of imperial disengagement and the emergence of stable independent states in the region. The successful management of this task will contribute enormously to the future stability of the Eurasian landmass. To make its contribution to this successful resolution, though, the West has to accept greater involvement and higher costs than it has up to the end of 1993. A useful start would be to concentrate less on the rhetoric of institutions and to focus more on making visible and substantive contributions to the prevention and resolution of regional conflicts.

CONCLUSIONS

The strategic implications of the collapse and dismemberment of communist empires, the most significant late twentieth-century challenge facing the international community, have confounded most expectations and projections. In certain regions, this imperial implosion has been accompanied by levels of violence and ethnic and territorial conflict which have shocked even the most cynical observers. The war-scarred landscapes of the Caucasus and the former Yugoslavia testify to the terrifying destructiveness of this upsurge of primitive atavism. In other regions, most notably in Eastern Europe and the European parts of the former Soviet Union, the imperial divorce has been more amicable, even if the new political arrangements are not free from serious tensions. Contrary to most expectations, the imperial disengagement of Central Asia from the Soviet yoke has broadly fallen into this latter category. Despite the civil war waged in Tajikistan, a relatively stable regional order has emerged which has imposed an armed settlement on Tajikistan and preserved the status quo in the four other former Soviet Central Asian states.

Whilst this paper has sought to justify the assumption of a relatively stable regional order, it has not underestimated the continuing fragility and the many internal and external threats to that order. The inter-ethnic, inter-clan and religious divisions in Tajikistan, which effectively destroyed the integrity of that state, are not unique. As was highlighted in Chapter II, all the newly independent states have similar, if less severe, internal divisions. As a consequence, none of the current leaderships of the Central Asian states can feel invulnerable to internal challenges to their authority and legitimacy. Disaffection over the state of the economy, the limited extent of political participation or the un-Islamic orientation of the state can all potentially ignite dissent and galvanise the opposition into a powerful revolutionary force.

On the external front, the stability of Central Asia remains constantly vulnerable to events and developments outside its borders and its control. The anarchy emanating from Afghanistan, which contributed to the violent confrontations in Tajikistan, remains a potential source of destabilisation. A campaign of Iranian-sponsored Islamic fundamentalism could also break through the pragmatic and non-ideological course engineered by Rafsanjani. China's future orientation and its ambitions are also unknown quantities and could easily adversely affect future developments within Central Asia. Most critically, Russia's commitment to its post-imperial status and its future

relations with an independent Central Asia are key factors behind any assessment of the prospects for stability in the region. A hostile neo-imperialist turn within Russia would undoubtedly provoke a confrontational response from the Central Asian states and would undermine the carefully constructed regional order, which has been dependent on Russia playing a constructive supporting role.

Yet, none of these qualifications and possible scenarios detracts from the empirical evidence of the robustness and resilience of the state structures in Central Asia, and the survival of the former communist elites who inherited these structures, during the two years of independence from 1991–93. Even in Tajikistan, the most significant development has been the enforced return to power of the *ancien régime* and the consolidation of its rule, albeit within the framework of an effective Russian and Uzbek protectorate. In the other Central Asian states, the ruling elites have survived the transition to independence without any major challenge to their power and have succeeded in consolidating their positions, expanding the coercive powers of the state apparatus and undermining the popular support and ideological appeal of other potential claimants to central power. In the process, a relatively stable balance of power has emerged which is suitably deferential to Russian sensitivities and strategic interests, but which does not undermine the process of imperial separation or the promotion of political, economic and cultural relations with other neighbouring countries and the wider world.

One of the most striking upward turns in fortune, at least for the Central Asian ruling elites, has been the realisation that the economic prospects for the region are not necessarily as bleak as originally thought. The discovery and prospective exploitation of large natural resource reserves in some of the states has provided a foundation for economic regeneration which other former Soviet states, such as Ukraine, have sorely missed. Similarly, the initial, if still uncertain, steps taken towards structural economic reform in the region have provided hope that the Central Asian economies will not descend to the impoverished level of most Third World countries.

Behind these cautious economic openings lies the strong hand of autocratic leaders who are sacrificing political liberalism for economic stability and growth. The repression of opposition and the entrenchment of one-party, or more accurately one-man, rule might not be good for the democratic process in Central Asia, but it is a contributory factor to regional stability, at least in the short to medium term. For the vast majority of the population in Central Asia, the key lesson of Tajikistan was the link between political liberalisation and bloody

conflict and the consequent benefits of a firm autocratic hand, however unpalatable, to guide their states' political and economic destiny. The political experience of these leaders, groomed through years of active involvement in the affairs of their countries during the Soviet period, has contributed to the orderly transition from imperial dependency to Central Asian independence.

The widespread, if sometimes reluctant, acceptance of the political legitimacy of these leaders is grounded in other significant features of the political and social landscape of Central Asia which have also been important stabilising factors. Unlike other parts of the Soviet Union, there was no dynamic anti-colonial and anti-Russian struggle for independence prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Although the memory of Russian and Soviet rule was just as bitter as in other areas of the former Soviet Union, there was no strong political pressure, such as in the Ukraine or the Caucasus, for hostile relations with post-Soviet Russia or for complete economic, political or military separation. Instead, the leaders of Central Asia were able to construct mutually advantageous relations with Russia which sought to protect those economic and military dependencies vital to the stability of the region. The Russian–Uzbek intervention in Tajikistan was a sign of the relative success of this Russian–Central Asian cooperation, at least when contrasted with the controversial and ineffective Russian interventions in the Caucasus.

At a more fundamental level, the absence of a mobilised anti-Russian movement in Central Asia reflects a deeper ambiguity over the nature of the Russian and Soviet imperial legacy. Although the Soviet-imposed territorial and nation-state formations are widely perceived to have been artificial constructs, there is no irrepressible demand for their forcible revision. Most of the population of the region broadly accept, if with reservations, the legitimacy of the nation-states in the region and their territorial integrity. At least there are no inherent disputes which have the explosive potential of a Nagorno-Karabakh or a Bosnia-Herzegovina. Diverging views over the status of such territories as northern Kazakhstan, the Ferghana Valley or of Samarkand and Bukhara are certainly live issues, but there are significant mediatory and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that such disputes do not escalate into inter-state or intra-state conflict.

In general, all these factors underpin the broad theme of this paper that a relatively stable regional order has emerged and that, barring major upsets internally or externally, the Central Asian states will continue to grow in confidence and develop their own independent identity. To use the suggestive imagery of an Uzbek journalist, the

Central Asian republics have grown out of the Soviet kindergarten into surprisingly robust young adults with ideas very much their own who are determined to unshackle the remaining ties to their parental guardians and find new friends and opportunities elsewhere. It is also in this formative period of early adulthood that the perceptions and attitudes of later years will be formed. Outside powers, therefore, have a unique, if short-lived, opportunity to influence this process. How should one think about this in geo-strategic terms? What are the most important countries and factors to keep in mind?

Look out for Uzbekistan

In trying to determine the most important strategic actors in the region, the sparsely populated countries of Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can be excluded as having little realistic opportunity to wield much political influence. This leaves Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, both with populations under 20m, as the only potential competitors for a more expansive regional role.

Kazakhstan's strategic credentials lie primarily in its vast size, larger even than Western Europe, and its sensitive geo-strategic position sandwiched between Russia and China. Its possession of nuclear weapons, and the international prestige of Nazarbayev and his close relations with the Russian government, have added to the sense of its special status in Central Asia. In addition, the potential riches of its natural resources have made Kazakhstan one of the most favoured destinations in the former Soviet Union for international businessmen and diplomats. With all these advantages, Kazakhstan would appear to be the obvious candidate for the leading regional power in Central Asia.

In reality, there are significant constraints against Kazakhstan assuming an influential regional role. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the divergent interests and loyalties of the Russian-speaking and Kazakh communities within the country have increased the internal weakness of the state. Nazarbayev has been forced to focus most of his energies on ensuring inter-ethnic harmony rather than projecting Kazakhstan as an independent external power. In defining Kazakhstan's foreign policy, he has also had to concentrate on the immeasurably more powerful neighbours of Russia and China. The deep Russian reservations about Kazakhstan adopting a more Muslim identity, expressed both by the Russian-speaking communities within Kazakhstan and by the Russian government, have limited Nazarbayev's opportunities to play a major regional role in Central Asia or the Middle East. With that avenue for power projection cir-

cession. The ambivalence with which all the neighbouring states have greeted Central Asian independence reflects their uneasy concern over the implications for the integrity of their own states. At the same time, the withdrawal of Soviet power and the emergence of the newly independent Central Asian states have complicated the regional balance of power, offering new opportunities, but also new potential threats for interested outside powers.

In general, the outside world has been slow to realise the nature and extent of the geo-strategic shifts taking place in Central Asia. Russian diplomats and policy-makers, accustomed to the old Soviet ideological *Weltanschauung*, have found it difficult to accept that the Soviet-imposed division between Central Asia and the Middle East has been breached. The speed with which radical Islam penetrated Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was the first worrying indication of the ideological porousness of the former Soviet borders. At the same time, the protests from Middle Eastern capitals at the Russian intervention in Tajikistan revealed that, in contrast to Soviet practice, Russia could not act in Central Asia without affecting its relations with the rest of the Middle East. Shorn of its anti-Zionist ideological facade, Russia has found itself in the same camp as most other Western countries in its relations with the Muslim world. Its political reputation will be judged primarily on how it treats the 20m Muslims in the Russian Federation and in the nature of its relations with the newly independent Central Asian states. As a consequence, Russian policy-makers have had to accept that any sustainable Russian Middle Eastern strategy must necessarily include the Central Asian political equation.

For its part, the Muslim response to the independence of the Central Asian states has been surprisingly unenthusiastic and shown little strategic coherence. It might have been expected that the liberation of 50m Muslims from communist tyranny would have been greeted with widespread popular acclaim. But the pervasive mood of pessimism in the Muslim world, with the fear that the events in Bosnia-Herzegovina presaged a new Christian onslaught, have drawn attention away from the potential strategic gains of the inclusion of the Central Asian states into the Muslim world. The parochial concerns and internal divisions of the Middle Eastern countries have added to the strategic incoherence. Iran, Turkey and Pakistan have tried to coordinate their policies through the ECO mechanism, but their deep mutual distrust has resulted in a unilateral and competitive rather than collaborative approach to the region. For the Arab countries, support for the Central Asian states has been vitiated by concern that these new actors would tilt the balance towards the non-Arab Muslim world and undermine the strategic primacy of the Palestine question.

Faced with this divided and uninviting Muslim response, the Central Asian states have kept their strategic options as open and flexible as possible. As the success of Israel's diplomatic advances has indicated, there are potential opportunities for all interested outside parties. This applies just as much to the West. Unlike most of the post-colonial Muslim world, Central Asia has no *a priori* anti-Western posture. As a result, there is a unique opportunity for the West to structure a less confrontational relationship with an important part of the Muslim world. This strategic opening will not last indefinitely. Disillusionment with the West, which is already emerging in countries like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan over human rights issues, would increase the attractiveness of the anti-Western rhetoric of the more radical parts of the Middle East.

The first step for any effective Western strategy towards Central Asia requires a proper assessment of the strategic shifts taking place in the region. It is no longer adequate to see these countries from a Russian perspective. Although support for the management of Russian withdrawal should be a central policy objective, it is important to treat the Central Asian states as independent actors in their own right who wish to define their own identity and strategic direction. The main Western objective should be to promote the stable environment in which this process of self-definition can be advanced. It is a visible Western engagement, rather than unfulfilled rhetorical promises, which will provide the greatest assurance of the emergence of a moderate and pro-Western polity in the Central Asian states. It is this underlying commitment which should define the framework in which Western countries provide their economic, political and military support to the new states of Central Asia.

Notes

Introduction

[1] Azerbaijan is sometimes classified as a Central Asian state. Although this is a legitimate view, this paper will focus on the countries east of the Caspian Sea.

Chapter I

[1] Milan Hauner, *What is Asia for us? Russia's Heartland Yesterday and Today* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 38–41.
[2] R. N. Frye, *Cambridge History of Iran: From the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and John A. Boyle (ed.), *Persian History and Heritage* (London: British Institute for Persian Studies, 1978).
[3] S. A. M. Adshead, *Central Asia in World History* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 200–1.
[4] Michael Kaser and Santosh Mehrotra, *The Central Asian Economies after Independence* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1992), p. 6.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[6] For the best modern history of Central Asia, see Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964).
[7] For the best description of Central Asian ecology and geography, see Robert A. Lewis (ed.), *Geographic Perspectives on Soviet Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 1992).
[8] For a comprehensive history of the nomadic movements of Central Asia, see R. Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970).
[9] Quoted in Hauner, *What is Asia for us?*, p. 43.
[10] Interview in *Moskovskye novosti*, no. 15, 11 April 1993.
[11] Interview in *Trud*, 26 May 1993.
[12] Wheeler, *Modern History*, pp. 124–28; and R. Vaidyanath, *The Formation of the Soviet Central Asian Republics. A Study in Soviet Nationalities Policy, 1917–1936* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976).
[13] Yaacov Ro'i, 'Central Asian Riots and Disturbances, 1989–1990: Causes and Consequences', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1991.
[14] For a comprehensive list of all the actual and potential territorial disputes in Central Asia, see *Moscow News*, no. 11, 1992. For a fuller analysis of the destabilising consequences of the Central Asian delimitation, see Igor Rotar, 'The Bomb placed by the Kremlin Cartographers', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 25 December 1992.
[15] Alexandre A. Bennigson and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
[16] For a good discussion of this in the context of Uzbekistan, see Donald S. Carlyle, 'Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks', *Problems of Communism*, September–October 1991.
[17] According to the 1989 census, the ethnic Uzbeks represented 68.7% of the population of Uzbekistan; the Turkmen 68.4% of Turkmenistan; the Tajiks 58.8% of Tajikistan; and the Kyrgyz 52.4% of Kyrgyzstan. The Kazakhs, however, constituted only 39.8% of the population of Kazakhstan and significant sections of the Russian community, which overall numbers around 38% of the country's population, have contested the Kazakhs' national privileges and their sovereign right to all of the country's territory.
[18] The one possible exception would be the Tajik–Uzbek dispute over Samarkand and Bukhara, since Tajiks have a deeply rooted historical grievance over the decision to locate these towns in Uzbekistan.
[19] For a fuller analysis of the different informal groups, see Shireen T. Hunter, 'Nationalist Movements in Central Asia', *Current History*, vol. 89, no. 549, October 1990; and Aleksandr Verkhovskii, *Middle Asia: The Political Spectrum* (Moscow: Informatsionno-ekspertnaya gruppa 'Panorama', 1992).
[20] For Karimov's criticisms, see James Critchlow, 'Uzbeks look Askance at Gorbachev's "Union" Ideas', *RFE/RL Research Report*, 1 March 1991.
[21] For an analysis of the history and programme of the IRP, see Bess Brown, 'The Islamic Renaissance Party in Central Asia', *RFE/RL Research Report*, 10 May 1991.
[22] The most detailed information on Islam's manifestations in the former Soviet Union can be found in Alexandre Bennigson and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide* (London: C. Hurst, 1985).
[23] For a sociological account of the level of Muslim observance, see R. Abazov, A. Vasilivetskii and V. Ponomarev, *Islam and Political Struggle in the CIS Countries* (Moscow: Informatsionno-ekspertnaya gruppa 'Panorama', 1992).
[24] Allen Hetmanek, 'Islamic Revolution and Jihad come to the former Soviet Central Asia: the Case of Tajikistan', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1993.
[25] Most of the following economic information is drawn from Kaser and Mehrotra, *Central Asian Economies*; Michael Bradshaw, *The Economic Effects of Soviet Dissolution* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1993); and from the six IMF reports on the countries of Central Asia published in May 1992 and June 1993. Much information was also gained from discussions with officials in Central Asia on a visit in April 1993.
[26] Note the ground-breaking study in Nancy Lubin, *Labour and Nationality in Soviet Central Asia: An Uneasy Compromise* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).
[27] For an excellent survey of the ecological situation in the former Soviet Union, see Ruben Mnatsakanian, *Environmental Legacy of the Former Soviet Republics (as collated from official statistics)* (Edinburgh: Centre of Human Ecology, Edinburgh University, 1992).
[28] For an evocative account of the Aral tragedy, see Timur Pulatov, 'Islam and the Sea. Apocalypse for the Inhabitants of the Aral', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 11 February 1993.
[29] 'Armed Forces of Kazakhstan: Problems and Prospects', *KazTag News Agency*, 23 November 1992, in *Summary of World Broadcasts* (*SWB*) SU/1552.

Chapter II

[1] For a good article on the Pamiris, see Igor Rotar, 'The Enigmatic Silence of the Pamirs', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 August 1992.
[2] Kaser and Mehrotra, *Central Asian Economies*, p. 3.
[3] For a fuller account of the evolution of the Tajik crisis, see Barnett R. Rubin, 'The Fragmentation of Tajikistan', *Survival*, vol. 35, no. 4, Winter 1993.
[4] The worst example of this was in the town of Shaartuz, see *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 24 November 1992.
[5] Official Tajik government statistics for the number of deaths ranged from 30,000 to 60,000. Independent journalists suggest that this figure was exaggerated and that the numbers would more likely be between 10,000 to 15,000. However, any figure can only be an informed guess.
[6] Semen Novoprudskii, 'Islam Karimov Warns', *Nezavisimiya gazeta*, 4 September 1992. See also Karimov's interview in *Vek*, no. 11, 1992; and *Mayak Radio*, 30 May 1992 in *SWB*

SU/1396 B/3.
[7] Interview with Grachev in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 7 May 1993.
[8] The Russian involvement was confirmed by a Russian Foreign Ministry official in *Izvestiya*, 15 April 1993.
[9] *Middle Asia: Reference Material – History, Politics, Economics* (Moscow: Institut gumanitarno-politicheskikh issledovanii, 1992), pp. 83–84.
[10] The other two regions are Khorezm, the successor to Khivan khanate, and the oblasts of Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya.
[11] *Itar-Tass*, 16 April 1993 in *SWB* SU/1670 B/12. See also Karimov's sacking of the *hakim* of Andizhan oblast in 'Uzbekistan's Special Path', *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 24 February 1993.
[12] *Middle East Economic Digest*, 5 June 1992, p. 22.
[13] Bess Brown, 'Tajik Civil War Prompts Crackdown in Uzbekistan', *RFE-RL Research Report*, 12 March 1993.
[14] *Daily Telegraph*, 31 March 1992.
[15] *Central Television*, 2 October 1991 in *SWB* SU/1194 B/4.
[16] *Moscow News*, 2 February 1992.
[17] Interview in *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 12 February 1993.
[18] Bennigson and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, pp. 98–99.
[19] The First Secretaries of the Turkmen Communist Party from 1969–85 were from Chardjou. Niyazov comes from Ashgabat and is a member of the Tekke tribe.
[20] For a comparison of prices, see *Aziya: International Weekly*, no. 12, March 1993.
[21] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 April 1993.
[22] Vladimir Kuleshov, 'Rejuvenation of Economic Activity in Turkmenistan', *Izvestiya*, 19 February 1993.
[23] Viktor Khatuntsev, 'Not on the Sands', *Delovoi Mir*, 17 May 1993.
[24] This suggestion was made at a joint Turkmen–Moldovan press conference in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 18 March 1993.
[25] Bennigson and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, p. 105.
[26] For a fuller discussion of this dispute, see Igor Rotar, 'The Mine placed by the Kremlin Cartographers', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 25 December 1992.
[27] Vladimir Streletskii, 'Is Kirgizia threatened with a Split?', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 5 March 1993; and *Itar-Tass*, 10 November 1993 in *SWB* SU/1845 G/3.
[28] *Itar-Tass*, 24 July 1992 in *SWB* SU/1443 B/3.
[29] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 29 April 1993.
[30] Bess Brown, 'Kazakhs Now Largest Group in Kazakhstan', *RFE-RL Research Report*, 4 May 1990.
[31] Martha B. Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987). See also the revised post-Soviet Kazakh history, *Studies of the History of the Republic of Kazakhstan* (Alma-Ata: n.p., 1992).
[32] This is well captured in Graham H. Fuller, *Central Asia: The New Geopolitics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1992), pp. 53–56.
[33] Andrew Wilson and Nina Bachkatov, 'Russia: The Cossack Revival', *The World Today*, January 1993; and Lt Col. Lester W. Grau, 'The New Russian Cossacks: A Force in a Time of Chaos', *Military Review*, December 1992.
[34] This is well described in Sylvia Gressler, *Kasachstans schwieriger Weg in die Unabhängigkeit: Ein Erfahrungsbericht* (Cologne: Bundesinstituts für ostwissenshaftliche und internationale Studien, 1993).
[35] *Interfax*, 7 December 1992 in *SWB* SU/1559 B/5.
[36] Already by August 1992 it was suggested that there were 7m Kazakhs (42%) as against 6.25m Russians (37%). See *Itar-Tass*, 26 August 1992 in *SWB* SU/1471 B/6.
[37] See an interesting article and a rare admission in the Kazakh press of the existence of tribalism in Murat Abridiv, 'Tribalism is Hostility', *Kazakhstanskaya pravda*, 10 November 1992.
[38] *The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan* (Alma-Ata: Lenizdat, 1993).
[39] *Washington Post*, 6 May 1992.
[40] *Moscow TV*, 16 February 1992 in *SWB* SU/1307 C1/3.
[41] Interview with Nazarbayev in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 May 1992.
[42] *Itar-Tass*, 19 August 1992 in *SWB* SU/1466 B/2.
[43] See Nazarbayev's UN General Assembly Speech in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 9 October 1992.
[44] *IMF Press Release*, no. 93/29, 23 July 1993.
[45] Nazarbayev interview on *Russian TV*, 10 November 1993, in *SWB* SU/1845 G/1.
[46] Paul Goble, 'Central Asians Form Political Bloc', *RFE-RL Research Report*, 13 July 1990.
[47] Semen Novoprudskii, 'A New Turkestan As a Defence against Moscow's Dictat', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 January 1993.
[48] Niyazov essentially undermined the Bishkek Summit in April 1992 by refusing to sign a number of protocols. See Boris Z. Rumer, 'The Gathering Storm in Central Asia', *Orbis*, vol. 37, no. 1, Winter 1993.

Chapter III

[1] For a selection of this criticism, see Yevgeny Ambartsumov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Committee on International Affairs, in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 20 October 1992; Vladimir Lukin, the Russian ambassador to Washington, in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 20 October 1992; and Sergei Stankevich, former State Counsellor for policy issues, in *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 23 June 1992 and *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 March 1992.
[2] This view was given Yeltsin's stamp of approval in the delineation of the Russian Foreign Policy Concept in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 29 April 1993.
[3] This marked a new direction for the seemingly moribund CIS, which Kozyrev subsequently admitted, noting that it was still 'open to Western states but, primarily, it was aimed at constructive interaction in the East'. See *Interfax*, 9 September 1993 in *SWB* SU/1794 G/2.
[4] For example, see the report on tensions in the border forces of Turkmenistan in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 14 August 1992; and similar problems in Kazakhstan in *Interfax*, 26 February 1992 in *SWB* SU/1316 B/7.
[5] After the death of 25 Russian border guards on the Tajik–Afghan border in July 1993, opinion polls indicated that a majority of the Russian population was in favour of a full withdrawal from Tajikistan. See *Moscow TV*, 6 September 1993 in *SWB* SU/1769 C1/2.
[6] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 14 July 1993.
[7] President Akayev in *Itar-Tass*, 13 February 1992 in *SWB* SU/1308 B/7.
[8] See Sami Cohen, 'Contacts with Central Asian States: A Foundation for Pan-Turkism', *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, August–September 1992.
[9] *Turkish TV*, 4 March 1992, in *SWB* SU/1322 A4/1.
[10] Semen Novoprudskii, 'Friendship with Friends, Peace with Neighbours', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2 December 1992.
[11] Cassandra Cavanaugh, 'Uzbekistan Looks South and East for Role Models', *RFE-RL Research Report*, 9 October 1992.
[12] See Karimov's denial that there is a new 'older brother' in *Pravda Vostoka*, 1 August 1992.
[13] See, for example, Thomas L. Friedman, 'US to Counter Iran in Central Asia', *New York Times*, 6 February 1992.
[14] *Tehran Times*, 9 January 1993; *Vision*

of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 7 December 1992 in *SWB*, ME/1559 A/2.

[15] *Middle East Economic Digest*, 4 December 1992, p. 32.

[16] For Iran's economic situation, see Vahe Petrossian, 'MEED Special Report on Iran', *Middle East Economic Digest*, 19 February 1993.

[17] For the rumours of Dostum's state, see *New York Times*, 17 January 1993.

[18] Ahmed Rashid, 'With God on Their Side', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 November 1992.

[19] J. Richard Walsh, 'China and the New Geopolitics of Central Asia', *Asian Survey*, vol. 33, no. 3, March 1993, p. 274.

[20] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 29 July 1992.

[21] Michael Dobbs, 'Kazakh Sets Conditions on A-Arms', *Washington Post*, 6 May 1992.

[22] *Middle Asia: Reference Materials – History, Politics, Economics* (Moscow: Institut gumanitarno-politicheskykh issledovanii, 1992), p. 58.

[23] The report is found in *Xinhua*, 27 October 1992, quoted in *SWB* SU/W0258 A/8. A certain scepticism should, however, be reserved for these figures. The IMF report on Kazakhstan, published in June 1993, only noted that 'exports to China appear to have increased in relative importance during 1992', although 'available data do not provide definitive evidence of changes in direction of trade'. However, in September 1993, Nazarbayev was noting that trade with China represented 22% of all trade. *Russian TV*, 10 November 1993 in *SWB* SU/1845 G/1.

[24] 'Chinese Immigrants Find a Foothold in Kazakhstan', *Moscow News*, no. 38, 17 September 1993. See also the alarmist Kazakh reports that up to 100 Chinese are settling daily in Kazakhstan in *KazTag*, 9 July 1993 in *SWB* SU/1739 A1/5.

[25] See Walsh, 'China and the New Geopolitics of Central Asia', p. 273.

[26] Igor Rotar, 'I will Take my Rifle and Go to Die in Tajikistan', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 26 March 1993.

[27] Rubin, 'The Fragmentation of Tajikistan', p. 84 .

[28] T. A. Davis, 'Communists Hit Back', *Asia–Pacific Defence Reporter*, April–May 1993.

[29] Ahmed Rashid, 'Russia Launches Initiative for Afghanistan', *The Independent*, 17 December 1991.

[30] See the investments made by the Israeli entrepreneur, Shaul Eisenberg, in Central Asia in *Financial Times*, 28 January 1993.

[31] The Saudi government, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, redirected much of the $1.5bn given in recompense for the Soviet contribution in the Gulf War towards Central Asia.

APPENDIX

Population Distribution, 1989

	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Turkmenistan	Tajikistan
Total	16,563	19,905	4,290	3,534	5,109
Kazakhs	6,535	808	37	88	11
Uzbeks	332	14,142	550	317	1,198
Kyrgyz	14	175	2,230	–	64
Turkmen	4	122	1	2,537	20
Tajiks	25	934	34	3	3,172
Russians	6,228	1,653	917	334	388
Ukrainians	896	153	108	36	41
Belarussians	183	29	9	9	7
Germans	958	40	101	4	33
Tatars	328	657	70	39	72
Kara-Kalpaks	–	412	–	–	–
Uighurs	185	36	37	–	–
Koreans	103	183	18	–	13

Source: *Central Asia Today* (Moscow State University of African and Asian Studies), no. 3, 1993.

Russian and Russian-speaking Populations in the Republics of the Former Soviet Union, 1989

	Ethnic Russians		Russian as first language	
	000s	%	000s	%
Russia	119,865	81.5	127,306	86.6
Kazakhstan	6,227	37.8	7,797	47.4
Kyrgyzstan	916	21.5	1,090	25.6
Uzbekistan	1,653	8.3	2,151	10.9
Tajikistan	388	7.6	495	9.7
Turkmenistan	333	9.5	421	12.0

Source: *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 7 September 1993.